

# **COMMUNIST REVIEW 4**

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**Imperialism in the**



**Middle East**

**Plus:**

**The International Bureau in India**



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# Editorial

For Marxists recent world events have confirmed the growing danger to humanity from the present system and the urgency of our task to create the basis for a revolutionary alternative. As the crisis of the world economy follows its own inexorable downward spiral it brings in its wake heightened social and political tensions. At the same time it is becoming more and more difficult for even the strongest capitalist economy (the USA) to push the burden of the crisis onto the weakest states. With a growing domestic and balance of payments deficit, the value of the dollar is falling and the US is seeking not just to make allies like West Germany and Japan pay more of the economic cost of maintaining Western imperialism: it wants to see a more unified support behind its immediate strategic and military objectives. For, as both Russian and American imperialism find themselves with less and less room for manoeuvre, it is the military option which is more and more becoming the only option for the bourgeoisie.

Thus, while the flimsy pretext for the US demonstration of its brute military might by the April 15th air strikes on Libyan cities (Ghadafy's supposed responsibility for the hijacking of the Achille Lauro, the Rome and Vienna airport bombings and the Berlin discotheque bombing) has since been revealed as spurious the media has kept quiet about it. This is not surprising because the real reason for the US attack is nothing to do with Ghadafy. As the article on the Middle East in this issue shows, US imperialism has suffered a series of setbacks in the area. The Libyan bombings were both a demonstration to Moscow that the US has no intention of seeing this continue (without as yet risking a direct confrontation with Russia) and at the same time a sharp "reminder" to the USA's European allies that defence of the "free world" means not flinching from wholehearted defence of US interests. In other words what we have witnessed is a significant step in the slide towards world war.

And while the various organisations of the

capitalist left reacted by demanding the expulsion of NATO bases from individual European states and protested their defence of "Libya" against US aggression it remained for the internationalist communist left to state clearly that the fight against imperialism means neither support for "Reagan and his allies, nor Ghadafy and his friends". In the statement which the IBRP issued (and which has now been translated into Arabic, Farsi and Bengali) we underlined the need for the international working class to recognise that it can have no allies in the governments of existing states and the need for workers everywhere to continue their struggle first of all against their own governments and from an independent political basis, through their own international party. The full statement is printed on page 14.

In the same month as the Libyan bombings the nuclear accident at Chernobyl in the Ukraine enabled the Western media to draw attention away from the dubious attempts by the US to defend the "free world" against terrorism and hypocritically howl about the inferiority of the "communist" bloc's safety precautions and concern for human life. As the extent of the fall-out (which respects no state boundaries) began to sink in, the Western propaganda campaign began to backfire as local populations were awakened to the danger of locally produced radioactivity. After Chernobyl only the incurably blind can continue to pretend that the Russian state's economic plans have anything to do with socialist planning. For the Eastern and Western bloc alike nuclear power is a product of imperialist military strategy and research. Its use as a 'domestic' fuel will be continued by both blocs on the grounds of cheapness regardless of the risk to human health and life.

Thus, in the latter half of the Eighties, more than fifteen years since the post-war 'boom' gave way to generalised world economic crisis, the words 'capitalist decadence' take on their full social and cultural as well as economic and political meaning. While, for example,

a pop singer gains an honorary knighthood for turning the plight of millions into a series of media spectacles (thereby uniting "the people" of the imperialist metropolises in a wave of moral sympathy which successfully obscures imperialist relations and capitalist agriculture as the real cause of the problem) imperialism continues to increase its military spending and reduces its "aid" to the weakest states. While the anger of millions of oppressed and exploited in South Africa is being channelled into nationalist ideology the economic austerity which sparked off their rage will continue to grow.

And it is here - in the ever-harsher effects which the capitalist crisis imposes worldwide - that the material basis is growing for a real alternative to the existing system. Even amongst the strife-torn, nationally-divided proletariat of the Middle East the fight against economic austerity and material deprivation is the basis for a united class response against all aspects of imperialism. The seeds are there, whether it be in such actions as the Israeli nurses' strike against wage cuts in June/July; Iranian workers' refusal to allow levies for the war against Iraq to be deducted from their wages; or the general strike in Beirut against the civil war which drew the city to a halt in July. What is needed is an independent political force to promote their ripening into a full-blown revolutionary class response. As the article in this issue says, this is the only realistic and concrete solution to the problems of the Middle East.

It is a sign of the times that the bulk of the IBRP's work at the moment involves discussion

and polemics with individuals and organisations outside of the capitalist metropolises. In those areas which are subject to the worst effects of the crisis the absence of an independent programme and class organisation are being felt more keenly by revolutionaries who daily witness the divisions imposed on an impoverished working class by imperialism's various nationalist, racist, religious and sexist ideologies. Thus the correspondence with the Alptarm Communists Collective (CCA) in Mexico is continuing (We hope to publish this in a later issue) and since our last issue we have received news from other comrades there (Colectivo Internacionalismo Comunista) who are interested in learning more about our politics.

We must thank our Iranian sympathisers who have translated key articles of ours into Farsi and compiled the first issue of an IBRP publication in Farsi which best translates as Communist Notes. Thanks also to those comrades who have begun to translate our texts into Arabic and have thus given our politics a small opening into the Arabic-speaking world.

Finally, our efforts to promote political discussion and the development of a firm revolutionary nucleus within the political milieu in India are reflected in this issue. While we extend a warm hand of welcome to Lal Pataka we do not deceive ourselves that this task has been completed. On the contrary, our comrades in India are well aware that the task has only just begun, but the very existence of Lal Pataka is a sign that our forces are growing worldwide and is an encouragement to us all to continue the task of extending our forces internationally.

IBRP, July 1986

## INTERNATIONALIST NOTES #1

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وایه ۸۸۱

# Imperialism in the Middle East

For those who see imperialism as simply a concept of political literature, a mere sociological definition, the present world crisis (partially controlled but never overcome), accompanied by growing economic, political and military competition between the world's largest powers, is capitalism's normal routine - of no special significance except for the updating of the list of the world's hot spots of war and tension. On the other hand, those who see imperialism as the daily operation of the economic contradictions of capitalist relations of production, which become more ferocious the worse the crisis becomes, recognise that the events in the Middle East (and elsewhere) deviate from capitalist "normality" and enter the framework of the clash between the interests of the great powers in a tragic preparation for the Third World War.

Recent events like the Israeli raid on Tunisia, the hijacking of the Achille Lauro, the "Sigonella" affair with the links between Italy and the USA, the Rome and Vienna bombings, are not only the obvious manifestation of local problems (Like the unresolved Palestinian question, the difficult relations between the Israeli state and the rest of the Arab world, the controversial "link" between the Arab bourgeoisie and the Palestinian proletarians they make use of.), they are also the symptom of a crisis which has hit the area and exacerbates the internal tensions of the mini-imperialisms. But above all we see the entanglement of the two major imperialisms which have been induced to intervene either diplomatically or militarily, according to each specific case and the opportunities opened up. It is certainly no accident that the Middle East and, by extension, its immediate geopolitical surroundings, are the theatre for conflicts like the Iran/Iraq War,

for civil wars like those in the Lebanon, South Yemen and Afghanistan, for serious tensions between states (Syria and Israel, Libya and Egypt) and of unresolved national questions like those of the Palestinians, the Kurds and the Armenians.

No matter how the Arab proletariat pays - whether as Palestinian fighters expelled and massacred by Israelis, Jordanians and Syrians; Lebanese sub-proletarians fighting among themselves in the service of the tattered Moslem bourgeoisies of the Berri, Jumblatt or Karame versions; or Iranian and Iraqi workers obliged to kill each other in trench warfare to decide whether the oil-bearing Shatt-al-Arab will be dominated by the Imam's theological bourgeoisie or by President Saddam Hussein's - all these episodes are partly the legacy of previous American imperialist politics and partly the fruit of Russian pressure for a bridgehead in the area.

It is no accident that tension in the south Mediterranean countries has increased geometrically, accompanied by the revival of the desperate terrorism of a few fringes of the Palestinians and involving the imperialist governments of Washington and Moscow. Fearing the destabilisation of the south Mediterranean, the Western press has been too quick to cry wolf (e.g. over Ghadafy and the anti-Arafat Palestinians). At the same time, the way America has reacted to something which is not new leads to the suspicion that the latest terrorist events, much more than a tactic in the hands of a few Palestinians or even of Ghadafy himself, are being used as the means to justify a much wider clash in the Middle East and the south Mediterranean.

It's difficult to give a handful of desperate

Palestinians or the head of the Islamic Yamaiza the responsibility for the American 6th Fleet's movement into the Mediterranean or for having "constrained" the Reagan administration to make an arrogant and criminal act of war against Libya.

It's difficult to believe that the factors which determine the Middle Eastern 'question', whilst being simply indigenous to the region, can end up involving neighbouring areas to the extent of forcing others to intervene from outside to put things right.

It is much more realistic to establish why, in the present economic and political world crisis which involves and affects everyone, a sneeze is sufficient for a roar to be heard, the firing of a gun causes rumours of war to echo.

Certainly, as it has been since the Second World War, the Mediterranean area is caught in a process of destabilisation whose effects today can easily be seen in the revolt of a part of the Islamic world as it confronts Western imperialism, in the mini-imperialist clashes of the indigenous bourgeoisies over the control of strategic areas and the exploitation of economic zones which are rich in oil. But the reason for all this can be traced to the devastating consequences of the world economic crisis and to the movement of imperialism's centres, which are more and more directly involved in the spiral of decay which they themselves generate.

The crisis of the Seventies, as well as setting in motion the typical mechanisms of price cutting and dumping (i.e. selling at a temporary loss) by the advanced areas onto the periphery; the recycling of petrodollars and the management of the oil question; the politics of interest rates in the US (especially in '85 when the gap between the capitalistically advanced and underdeveloped countries widened even further); also produced in the Middle East a sudden change in the imperialist balance of forces, resulting in a destabilisation as widespread and profound as it was radical and rapid.

Today, at an advanced stage in the economic crisis of the entire capitalist world, when the struggle to preserve national interests and areas of influence is overstepping the normal limits of "defence", the Middle East is an area of confrontation which at the same time contains its own, dramatic, contradictions.

The area is tremendously important from a strategic point of view. Its geographical position, at the meeting point of three continents, makes it an essential part of increasingly pressing military strategies.

For the same geographical reasons the Middle East is necessarily the commercial and financial transit centre between West and East and between the industrialised and underdeveloped areas. Moreover there is the question of oil. This source of energy, although noticeably diminished in recent years, remains a product of primary importance. Thus, the clash of "internal" and "external" interests is nothing new. All that is new is the violence and intensity of the clashes between the usual protagonists, who are induced by the economic crisis to take territory and resources from one another, to attack their own and each others' proletarians in order that their regimes and economies can survive. The ancient quarrel between Iran and Iraq, much older than the war; the deliberate destruction of the Lebanese financial structure; the antagonism between Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia; the recent, but not new, tension between Egypt and Libya; the ambiguous confrontation between the Arab League and Israel with its tragic subplot of the Palestinian problem; but, above all, the partly visible, partly subterranean, but never painless evolution of Russo-American interference, these are all the manifestation of a concentric series of spheres of influence which stretch from the confused aspirations of the proletariat and the masses of the disherited through the Arab bourgeoisie's interests to culminate in a complex game of US and Russian pressure and intervention.

Before the arrival of the present intricate situation, American imperialism's movements in relation to the Middle East had two distinct phases. The first, from 1948 to 1973, was entirely centred on support for the Israeli state and excluded any possibility of relating to the adversaries of Zionism. The second began with the fourth Arab-Israeli war and was based on a shrewder policy of greater scope, dictated by the need to prevent Russian imperialism from using increases in the price of crude oil to gain control over the great trade routes for oil, both in the Persian Gulf (Iran) and in the Mediterranean (Turkey, Lebanon). By the beginning of the Eighties the success of this second phase had led to American imperialism to dominate the area, or at least into a position of being able to determine the internal and

external policies of many Middle Eastern countries. But the disintegrating effects of the international economic crisis, combined with the dangerous game of pushing up the dollar and the "Peace in Galilee" operation, caused a crisis in the old equilibrium and revived unresolved problems (the Lebanese civil war, the Palestinian problem the Iran/Iraq war). Leadership roles were redistributed through the region. (Besides the redefining of Egypt, Iran and Iraq's roles, Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia caught their breath and grew in arrogance.) Above all, the crisis caused an ever-more painful decline for American imperialism, simultaneously opening up opportunities for Russian imperialism.

Two examples stand out. Firstly, that of Lebanon. Born of the Camp David agreement, the Peace in Galilee operation was supposed to secure three aims:

- 1) Above all, repayment to Israel for the forced restitution of the Sinai peninsula to Egypt;
- 2) The extermination of hotbeds of Palestinian resistance in upper Galilee and the protection of Israel's Eastern border;
- 3) The offer of a kind of military protectorate to the Maronite-Christian government which would transform the neighbouring part of Lebanon from an allied country in need of help into a dependent country, all with the approval of American imperialism.

In reality the Peace in Galilee operation achieved only the second of these aims with the great drawback of the quarrel between the Maronite-Christian financial bourgeoisie and the fringes of the Moslem bourgeoisie. For the Washington-Tel Aviv axis, what was supposed to be a mopping-up operation to ensure the survival of Zionist mini-imperialism and to spread the influence of American imperialism in the Middle East was transformed into its opposite, into a creeping defeat.

Israel, racked by serious economic crisis, suffered a weakening of its traditionally strong institutions - such as the army, from which there were desertions, and the state, in which there was a government crisis. These events are without parallel in seriousness and intensity from '48 until today. Israel was forced to first redefine its own imperialist ambitions and then to withdraw its troops. By evacuating the territory it had occupied Israel abandoned the Gemayel government to its fate and gave free play to Syrian ambitions. Now Lebanese destinies are played out in Damascus. Gemayel is not alone in being forced to take Assad's

"advice". Berri's Shiites, Jumblatt's Druze and Karame's Sunnis have to do the same. Moreover, the Israeli defeat means American diplomatic attempts to be the umpire in the disastrous situation in Beirut and its environs count for as little as a deuce in a game of picquet. The "Pax Americana" project has had no effect, either in its Shultz or Habib versions. In conclusion, the Lebanese events, which were paid for in blood by thousands of proletarians, are taking on a new but precarious shape, irrespective of the feuds of its bourgeoisie. The Damascus-Moscow axis has entered alongside the Washington-Tel Aviv one.

The second example is the Palestinian question itself. Following the Lebanese events there have been problems for the Palestinian liberation movement too. The worst of these was the military defeat, the most serious since Tel al Zatar. From that moment Arafat, who was already inclined to consider a negotiated solution with all its problematical implications (renunciation of the total reconquest of Palestine and recognition of Israel), appeared to accept the Reagan plan as the lesser evil. The sum of the military and diplomatic defeats inflicted by the Arab bourgeoisie as well as by the Zionist foe, was such that Arafat - the Palestinian bourgeoisie's most coherent exponent, believed that the time had come to leave the false protection of the pan-Arabists and accept that of the USA. In short: a ghetto state in Transjordan for the Palestinian financiers and traders which, although not much, could be a good starting point if nothing else, "and then we'd see".

Arafat had one reservation: he wanted effective political autonomy and not the protection of King Hussein. And if it had to be a negotiated solution, it would be better to come to an agreement with the USA rather than chase after unlikely supporters inside or outside the Middle East. Such a perspective, with everything still to play for, might please Arafat and the capitulationist fraction of the Palestinian bourgeoisie, but it would not please the more radical fraction nor the Palestinian people in Transjordan who would feel they were in an Indian reservation camp without the benefits of state aid. But, more tellingly, the Americans would not be liked in either Damascus or Moscow. The break-up of the PLO, consummated in the battle of Tripoli between the so-called loyalists and Abu Mussa's radical comrades - intentionally brought about by Syria - was certainly a direct blow against the PLO and Jordanian ambitions, but it was also a warning to American diplomacy.

And if the "weak" forces of Assad succeeded in expressing themselves in this way it is only because they were completely rearmed by the Russians (who also threw in missiles) and because their every political move was discussed and approved beforehand in Moscow. Here too, the Damascus-Moscow axis, although not completely supplanting that of Washington-Tel Aviv, gained important positions. Thus the destabilisation of the Middle East and, by extension, the south Mediterranean, is certainly a fact. However, its main causes are not to be found in the despair of the Palestinians, but rather in the friction between the imperialist powers as they vie with each other for control in the area.

### THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION

The Palestinian question cannot be posed in terms of the relation between Zionism and the Palestinian people alone, as a sort of atypical war of national liberation. The role of American imperialism has to be considered, both in the birth of the Israeli state and in its present game with Arafat on the backs of millions of Palestinian proletarians and subproletarians.

On 14th May, 1948 the Zionist dream became reality by a mandate of the UN. Simultaneously there was born the possibility of American imperialism entering the Middle Eastern chess game: a game of great importance from both a strategic and economic or commercial point of view.

For American imperialism entry into the Middle East meant above all encouraging the departure of the old Anglo-French imperialisms which had hitherto dominated there. In the second place, it was necessary to outflank Arab mistrust since at the time of their nationalist 'redemption' they didn't want to run the risk of leaving the old bosses' 'protection' in order to take on another, more sophisticated form of the same.

For the US, therefore, the only road open was that of disrupting the new-born Middle Eastern reality by encouraging, if not directly imposing, the insertion of a "foreign body" which would be completely dependent and desirous of more aid and assistance the greater its inevitable economic isolation and the danger of military aggression from the Arab world was. Those who cried "miracle", who believed that the birth of Israel was the natural conclusion of a national struggle of a people who had searched for centur-

ies for their "own" country, who exalted the pressure of the will of David's descendants as fundamental and decisive, made the great mistake of confusing important features with the primary cause.

The Jewish people's will, determination, diplomatic astuteness and the tragedy of six million killed in Nazi concentration camps would not have been enough if there hadn't been an imperialist interest, the weight of which, when thrown on the balance, made it come down in favour of the Zionists. One can say many things about imperialism, but not that it is a humanitarian association dedicated to support religious and national minorities.

The American administration at the time valued the opportunity of entering a region which was rich in that most important raw material, for both energy and chemical processes, and which was of fundamental military importance for the control of the south Mediterranean and - via the Persian Gulf - the Indian Ocean. Entering this area would allow, sooner or later: a) the administration, or at least the determination of the conditions for the extraction and trade in oil; b) the transformation of strategically important points into bases for military operations; c) making use of new markets as outlets for overproduction and finance capital; d) (last but not least) prevention of Russian imperialism from doing anything but biding its time.

In this climate of national ambitions and imperialist perspectives Israeli-American "friendship" was born. Just as the Zionists needed a great power to act as their patron, to finance and defend the idea of a Jewish state, so for American imperialism the birth of Israel was the key to the Middle East, an area from which it had always been excluded.

Even in 1943 the American Government, via the Jewish Agency whose office was in New York, began to send finance capital and arms to Palestine. This was in order that Zionist militants could fight simultaneously against their British ex-allies and the Arab nationalists with the already-declared aim of creating the most favourable conditions for ensuring that, by the end of the war, the discussion on the birth of the Jewish state would take place against the background of a certain material foundation, gained by force of arms.

At the end of the war, as the residual Anglo-



French presence crumbled, American diplomacy proposed and imposed the recognition of the legitimacy of the Zionists' nationalist ambition. The next step was that of enabling a state which had recently appeared on the map to survive the Arab world's military and economic encirclement and, simultaneously, of establishing all those conditioning mechanisms of political blackmail needed to transform the newborn Israeli state into a faithful (because it had to be!) ally of American foreign policy in the Middle East. A type of extension to the Marshall Plan with an enormous expenditure of finance capital brought with a proportionally great political lever. Between 1950 and 1968 alone Israel received \$15,000 million. In the same period the Washington government encouraged American private investment in Israel, giving its own capitalists fiscal relief amounting to \$25,000 million. Moreover, the "good offices" of America caused \$862 million to flow into Tel Aviv's cash box from Germany, in the form of moral indemnification, and allowed the Israeli government to enjoy a loan of \$40 million, payable in 20 years at an incredible rate of interest of 1%. Even today Israel enjoys American "aid" of \$3,000 million per annum, topped up by the CIA according to international and internal circumstances. In return, Zionism is compelled to link its own struggle for survival to American imperialism's intervention in the region. It must act as a bulwark for Western interests in the Middle East and function as an anti-Russian bastion whenever required. Even in 1951 "David's Army" had to send a symbolic contingent into Korea alongside the Americans. Three times in the three Lebanese civil wars Israel, either as part of or alongside the UN forces, threw itself against the Moslem factions in the defence of another bulwark of Western imperialism: the Maronite-Christian governments of Chamoun, Franje and Gemayel. Moreover, its endemic struggle against the Palestinians has had the complementary task of preventing for as long as possible the PLO (or part of it) from being included, via Syria, in Moscow's sphere of interest, and ensuring that the Kremlin's attempt to gain access to the region finds in the watchful presence of the army of David, not only a psychological deterrent, but also a real obstacle to take account of.

This makes the Palestinian problem even more tragically complex, whether for purely nationalist and bourgeois elements or for future attempts at revolutionary solutions. In the present phase of capitalism's decadence, which is characterised by the worsening of inter-imperialist

conflicts, the Palestinian question cannot be solved on the basis of a national liberation struggle as at the beginning of the century. Here the economic and strategic components which make up the picture and turn this question into part of a much more complex strategy must be given the greatest consideration.

The common limitation of those groups which look to the PLO for a solution (including its radical dissenters and certain revolutionary metropolitan organisations) is to consider the Palestinian question within a national bourgeois perspective as if this was the only way to look at it, and to use tactics which might produce an immediate concrete result, even if this is minimal and renunciatory. Such groups leave consideration of any other perspective for after the victory of the national bourgeoisie, saying "and then we'll wait and see". They don't even make the effort to analyse a viewpoint which falls outside this schema, as if the Palestinian struggle could be nothing but a national bourgeois struggle, trapped within the narrow ambit of anti-Zionism, in a little world of its own with its own little solution excluding imperialist factors and revolutionary perspectives.

Thus the pragmatic schematicism of the left fringes of the PLO and certain metropolitan revolutionary groups not only places the national solution before the socialist solution; not only sees a particular bourgeois framework as the only possible one (evaluating every attempt to overcome this as the wild dream of utopians), but is consequently obliged to work for national, as against revolutionary solutions, without ever passing beyond the compromising and therefore counter-revolutionary tactics of stagism, so dear to third-worldist democratism and frontist Maoists of the first order.

#### THE REAGAN PLAN - THE PLO AND THE NSF

A confirmation of this capitulationist and counter-revolutionary attitude can be found in the various reactions to the American proposal for solving the Palestinian problem, better known as the Reagan plan. After its stinging defeat in Iran, the unresolved Lebanese question and the added problem of Israel's retreat from the heights of Galilee, the proposal's primary purpose was to prevent American imperialism from losing any more ground in the region by putting it once again in the position of being the sole political and diplomatic reference.

point for both the moderate Arabs and the Palestinians inside the PLO.

In addition, the plan aimed at purchasing, if not the political support, then at least the Jordanians and Palestinians' indifference towards American strategy. A solitary mess of pottage, represented by that pocket of land, Transjordan, would be simultaneously a "Palestinian State" and Jordanian territory. Thus America's Israeli ally would only lose a patch of earth in return for official recognition. It would be an incomplete solution which would involve everyone without resolving anything; a compromise which would be difficult to put into practice. In the end it would be American political interests which prevailed and certainly not the Palestinian population's nationalist ambitions, since they would be herded into a ghetto territory deprived of any economic structure, lacking political sovereignty and under the watchful protection of "policeman" Hussein - who has already used ferocious repression in his confrontations with the Palestinians.

Despite this the Palestinian bourgeoisie did not reject the plan. As the expression of mainly financial and speculative interests not directly linked to the possession of land or management activity, the Palestinian bourgeoisie considered Reagan's "solution without a solution" to be the least of evils and the only realistic framework for obtaining official recognition and territory for the better organisation of their own objectives.

Four Arab defeats in as many wars against Israel, the ambiguity of the Arab League and, above all, the empirical observation that in the Middle East, as elsewhere, a nation is either inside a political bloc or it is out of the game itself, have taught Arafat and the Palestinian financial clan that it is better to accept a compromise with American imperialism as its patron than insist on radical nationalist demands for autonomy.

This road is certainly a long one and putting it into practice is very difficult. But just as certain is the fact that Arafat's PLO no longer follows the old Al Fatah programme of '56 which calls for the birth of a Palestinian state on the ruins of the Zionist one, against the UN resolution of '47, against any recognition of Israel or its rights, for a free, secular, democratic and progressive state.

Today's PLO programmes are within the framework

of the ridiculous American proposal and contain the "minimum programme" for a statelet trapped between Israel and Jordan, which would be a despairing ghetto for millions of the disinherited - a kind of enormous refugee camp like all the others in the Palestinian people's history.

The PLO's only reservations are that this future state be a politically sovereign one rather than just administratively autonomous, and that the PLO be considered as the one and only representative of the Palestinian people during the negotiations. That's not much for those who have had to renounce the total reconquest of their own territory, who have had to recognise Israel's right to exist, who, for a mess of pottage, enter into American imperialism's plans as a bargaining counter.

In this game there is room for American imperialism, a small place for the Palestinian bourgeoisie but there is nothing concrete to interest the Palestinian proletarians and subproletarians, who are once again nothing but the victims with whom to speculate and on whom to unload the responsibility for the inevitable 'destabilisation' to follow. Those who are used to rotting in refugee camps scattered throughout the Middle East, who have to beg for survival far from their home, who would find it a luxury to be treated like an animal for once, will find it easy to fall into the trap of a bourgeoisie which promotes a homeland, unfortunately without a capital 'H', but nevertheless a homeland. And it is even easier to transform hundreds of thousands of the disinherited into combatants if this bourgeoisie gives its own best cadres as an example. And this is where the illusion lies, an illusion which bewilders the Palestinian proletariat and the metropolitan pseudo-revolutionaries alike - all of them ready to chase after the nearest (concrete) objective, at first losing sight of and eventually abandoning any attempt at revolutionary preparation. Today in Palestine, as in the remotest corners of the capitalist market, there is no common ground between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, so there can be no alliances - not even in a national struggle which has as its primary (we would add, sole) objective the creation of a bourgeois government, even if this is "secular", "democratic" and "progressive".

#### WHAT IS THE PLO?

To recognise that the PLO is the militant, organised political expression of the Palestinian

bourgeoisie's interests is the basis for understanding the phenomenon but not in its entirety. All too often the "critical" defenders of the PLO understand the organisation's fundamental role but deny the bourgeois nature of those who lead the largest organisation for the 'liberation' of Palestine and the cynical game they play vis-a-vis the proletariat.

Arafat's political strength, which has been challenged more than once, including by force of arms in the battle of Tripoli, is still directly proportional to his role as administrator and procurer of capital. Through him the PLO has received around \$300 million from the Arab League over the years. Moreover, Arafat has succeeded in raking together another hundred million dollars from wealthy Palestinians in the diaspora, as well as from workers dispersed throughout the four corners of the Middle East by taking an average of 5% straight from their pay packets. This unquestioned capacity of his which elevated him to political leadership has meant that he has always been an essential channel for the passage of a vast quantity of capital. The PLO's political stance is in line with the expectations of those who have so much money to throw around. For the Palestinian bourgeoisie Arafat's political programme, whether in its old, integral version or in the capitulationist form imposed by Washington, is a trustworthy reference point, a bulwark against radical adventurism and against any possible revolutionary attempts.

In other words, the PLO's programme under Arafat's leadership is not only the political expression of the Palestinian bourgeoisie's interests but is simultaneously a barrier against any proletarian movement which has the immediate aim of organised political autonomy and the perspective of a class revolution instead of the construction of a bourgeois state. For the Middle East's absolute monarchies and the Gulf's Emirates, Arafat and his moderate line are the guarantee that the struggle for the liberation of Palestine will remain enclosed within the boundaries of bourgeois nationalism and will not be the reason for the political radicalisation of the proletarian masses of in the Middle East. This is the only explanation for the fact that even now, in the midst of infinite contradictions and in a climate of immense tension in the most unstable area of the world, Arafat and his organisation can still attract so much capital internally and externally. The PLO is a bourgeois organisation

not only because it tactically and strategically pursues a nationalist objective, but because winning over the exploited and dispersed masses, proletarians and subproletarians, to this line means diverting their anger and desperation away from revolutionary objectives which are incompatible with any bourgeois programme. For the Palestinian financiers this is one more reason for helping to finance the PLO.

In keeping with his aims and overall ideology, Arafat makes a calculated use of these donations. Part of the money is used for military organisation and the purchase of arms; part of it is directed to the sphere of logistics, including diplomatic representation; another, minimal, part is devoted to social assistance for the guerrillas' families; but the largest portion goes to investment in production and financial speculation.

Thanks to the PLO, by 1976 the Palestinian financial bourgeoisie already possessed the INTRA bank - in terms of the volume of its business, the third most important bank in the Lebanon. Today the PLO owns the Arab Bank with its headquarters in Amman and twenty branches spread throughout the world, including Europe and the US. About 60% of Jordan's economy is in the PLO's hands, in the form of direct and indirect management of agricultural concerns, of small and medium-sized companies: in particular credit and insurance firms and transport companies. Before the battle of Tripoli the Palestinian bourgeoisie's interests in Lebanon were also enormous and were oriented particularly towards banking and financial speculation. Outside of these two countries Palestinian interests are spread throughout the Middle East. A good many of the Gulf's petroleum firms' shares pass through the hands of the PLO and its financial companies. It is no wonder that this bourgeoisie, conditioned by past events and forced to operate without a fixed reference point, administers its interests more like a big rentier than a business manager and that it uses the not inconsiderable sum of \$400 million per annum for a prudent and parasitic valorisation of capital, with military expenditure relegated to the petty cash.

Thus, this financial bourgeoisie which is economically strong but politically weak puts the extraction of profit and banking interests, no matter where, above everything else. It certainly doesn't bother to stir itself to relieve, even in a bourgeois fashion, the miserable

living conditions of millions of Palestinians. The reason that even a precarious "official" state would please this handful of rentiers and speculators is that they could better weave the web of their own interests. An organisation which defends such a class with interests like this not only has no room for any revolutionaries who may have "astutely" infiltrated it, but is the tomb of any class political experience. This is as true now as it will be in future.

But what of the "external faction" of the PLO, the Palestinian circle which has distanced itself from Arafat's organisation in a break which was consummated by fire of arms as well as by political polemics? All these micro-organisations hostile to Arafat's capitulation and his gradual moves towards the conditions of the "Pax Americana" take part in the National Salvation Front [NSF] of Abu Mussa, Abu Nidal, Ahmed Ibril, Habbash and Company. They accuse Arafat of having sold the Palestinian cause off to American imperialism, of having renounced the old integral programme and, not least, of having recognised Israel's right to exist.

Certainly a serious accusation, carrying important tactical and strategic implications. But this is all still within a nationalist and bourgeois perspective. The "philosophy" which bolsters the NSF's precarious structure is inspired by the various expressions of populist idealism, mutated in some cases by old-style Stalinist, old-style Maoist, Islamic non-integralist and social-reformist political attitudes. - A score of badly-constructed positions which find their catalysing and unifying element in the programme of the radical bourgeoisie. Beside the "socialist" Hawatmeh there is the nationalist Abu Mussa, secretary of the Al Fatah General Command, the Islamic "progressive" Abdul Hamid, and a series of political personages, groups and grouplets allied in pursuit of three objectives:

- 1) a struggle without quarter against Arafat's PLO and its claim to be the sole representative of the Palestinian people;
- 2) a return to the entirety of the old programme which saw the liberation of Palestine solely and exclusively in terms of the armed struggle and the destruction of the Israeli state. Corollaries: no compromise with Zionism, no partial reconquest of territory, no negotiated road to solve the Palestinian question;
- 3) alliances with the "socialist" countries through the Damascus-Moscow channel as a necessary condition for the creation of a diplomatic and political weight to encourage the struggle

against Zionism and American imperialism.

These three aims, although widening the tactical differences and drawing up the battle lines with Arafat's PLO, do not in the least question a bourgeois basis for the solution of the question "Minimum" or "maximum" programme, complete or partial nationalist demands, armed struggle or negotiations, they all remain within the same national and bourgeois framework.

The NSF does not accuse the "renegade" Arafat of being the instrument of the financial bourgeoisie, nor even of the bad management of Palestinian capital, still less of putting a nationalist solution before a revolutionary one, but of having lowered his sights and accepting a negotiated solution under American patronage. Opposition to this takes the form of carrying on the armed struggle with an orientation towards the other pole of imperialism.

Thus the bourgeois nationalist approach remains unshakeable. What differentiates the PLO from the NSF is that the former, if only to give its activity concreteness, is disposed to enter more or less directly into the games of American imperialism, even when this is merely as a bargaining counter. For the NSF Russia's military and diplomatic support transmitted through Syria is the sole practical political perspective. Once again the law which states that in capitalism's decadent epoch bourgeois nationalists must necessarily choose an imperialist camp is verified. This law has very few exceptions.

In each case, whether they seek to negotiate an agreement with Israel under American imperialism's patronage or whether they invoke Syria's help with consequent Russian backing, the result is the same: the annihilation of any hint of revolution because each 'solution' is conditional upon the same bourgeois nationalist demands. For those who have any illusions about the most powerful imperialist centres, it is enough to glance at American policy from '45 till today in the Middle East and Central America in order to understand the role of the leader of the Western bloc. At the same time, those idealists of whatever stripe who are convinced of Syria's progressive role should cast their minds back to the '75-76 civil war in the Lebanon which finished with the massacre of thousands of Palestinians and Lebanese proletarians in the battle of Tel Al Zatar. Assad's regime is certainly no less reactionary and bloody than that of Hussein of Jordan and his mini-imperialist ambitions in the region are no



less than anyone else's. His relations with Russia only serve to reinforce his own role in the region, at the same time opening up room for the Kremlin's imperialist ambitions.

#### THE REVOLUTIONARY ROAD

But for Palestinian proletarians and the disinherited, is there really only a choice between a "white" pro-American bourgeoisie and a "red" pro-Syrian bourgeoisie? Must their desperation, their willingness to struggle be channelled towards the nationalist programme, whether in its complete or reduced version? Or should the Palestinian proletarians, like the proletariat of the whole Middle East, pursue a solution befitting a revolutionary class?

Looking at the counter-revolutionary perspectives for bourgeois nationalist solutions, the PLO's is no solution at all and not even worthy of consideration. Given the present balance of forces in the Middle East and the world as a whole, the NSF solution is impossible to realise. Achieving the liberation of Palestine on the basis of the destruction of Israel would mean defeating American imperialism completely in this area, a rather difficult task which would take a 3rd World War to accomplish rather than simply a struggle for national demands. The USA would never allow the destruction of the state of Israel, especially if Russian imperialism was hidden behind the hypothetical agents of such a warlike operation. Only a general conflict involving a direct collision between the two central imperialisms could create the opportunity of achieving such an aim. And it is here that the final weakness of the thesis of those "concrete" pseudo-revolutionaries who hold that any effort towards a future revolutionary solution is in vain, who tail - more or less critically - Arafat's loyalism or Abu Mussa and company's rebellion, is manifest. The present balance of forces means that the short-term perspectives are not comforting, either for a revolutionary or a bourgeois solution. Thus, everything has to be considered from a long-term perspective which does not exclude the possibility of world war, or at least serious military events in the area. Given this what is the role of revolutionaries? Is it to insert themselves at all times and at all cost into a nationalist struggle (even if it is in response to imperialist war), or rather to begin the first steps, although they may be slow and faltering, towards a revolutionary perspective?

Our reply to those who argue that in the peripheral countries (characterised by underdeveloped industry, reactionary institutions and retarded class consciousness) it is not possible to put the proletarian revolution on the agenda but only national revolution or, at best, a kind of uninterrupted revolution which involves first the nationalist victory and then the creation of a revolutionary democratic republic as a necessary pre-condition for the proletarian revolution itself, is that such positions (justified by notions such as "flexible", "concrete" and "non-adventurist tactics") are in reality an expression of the counter-revolution.

Fundamental to our analysis is that, with all their backwardness and their complex problems of social composition, the peripheral countries are nevertheless an integral part of the world economy and their underdevelopment reflects the privileges of the industrialised area. The fact that they are, within the world market, simultaneously objects and subjects of exploitation does not confer on their bourgeoisies (whether "reactionary" or "progressive") any different role from the conservative role played by every local bourgeoisie today. Neither does it exempt their proletarians from pursuing a class political perspective which is autonomous and irreconcilable with any part of the bourgeoisie. The spiralling effects of the economic crisis itself, which began in the financial and economic centre of the capitalist world (the USA), are now being felt prevalently in the weakest areas. It is no accident that today, when myths about an economic recovery in the USA, Europe and Japan are being fostered, the rest of the world - from Asia to Africa, in South America just as in the Middle East - has witnessed the devastating consequences of the crisis. Similarly, it is not by chance that the greatest social tensions manifest themselves in these very areas, exacerbating already serious internal problems and encouraging, as in the Middle East, wars between states (Iran/Iraq), civil wars (Lebanon) and the radicalisation of an atypical war of national liberation such as the Palestinian one. All this means that more than ever a generalised imperialist war is required for the bourgeois "solution" to decadent capitalism's crisis.

Just as the cyclical process of the crisis has led it to permeate every corner of the capitalist market in turn; just as imperialism today appears ready to try to escape from its crisis through a violent rehearsal of world

war - the signs of which are growing progressively - the world proletariat, no matter in which corner of the market it finds itself, no matter which bourgeoisie it has to settle accounts with, whatever concrete situation it must start from, must either pursue a revolutionary solution together with the international revolutionary vanguard, or it will tail the national interests of its own bourgeoisie (in the same way as the bourgeoisie tails one or other of the imperialist fronts) and become cannon fodder as usual.

Today's pressing problem for revolutionaries in general and for the scattered elements of the vanguard who are confronted with this social reality is not how and when to pose the revolutionary solution, but of how to march towards a class response which is free from every kind of bourgeois influence. This is imperative today in the Middle East: in the peripheral as well as in the advanced countries. If empirical observation of the facts and the present balance of forces reveals (as it does) the absence of real revolutionary parties, and if an uncomfortable backwardness in political consciousness is confirmed (something which is not confined to the Middle Eastern proletariat), this should not lead to a programmatic renunciation of a revolutionary solution with the consequent tactical elaboration of intermediate stages and an inevitable postponement of the development of the class struggle. On the contrary, this is all the more reason for additional effort today to create every possible basis for the proletariat's response of tomorrow being a revolutionary one rather than yet again becoming absorbed by the various factions of the bourgeoisie.

Whether or not we desire it, the tempo for a generalised conflict, or the expansion of the present war zones to such a degree that they are of outstanding importance for decadent imperialism, is maturing at a frightening rate. The eventuality of a drastic and violent redistribution of the market and of the sources of raw materials, with the deadly corollary of the destruction of the means of production and of human lives, is not just a methodological approach to the analysis of capitalist reality, an abstract object of study, but an eventuality for which the world proletariat should prepare. The economic crisis and the tendency towards war exist throughout the capitalist market and a proletarian response can and should come from every part of it. Those who are blinded by the surface of the phenomena, bogged down

in the particular to the extent that they have lost sight of the general framework of the situation are themselves up to their necks in the shit of a crisis which daily poses the imperialist solution of war. When they idealistically follow bourgeois nationalist programmes as the "necessary" launching pad for a later revolutionary solution and justify this by clinging to the backwardness and immaturity of the peripheral countries, they objectively put themselves on the other side of the barricade. In other words, working towards this "tactical" solution only means preparing the ground for defeat.

This is the reason why the Palestinian proletariat and the millions of disinherited Palestinians cannot choose between this or that wing of the bourgeoisie. Instead they must follow the only possible course: organisational and political autonomy, alliance with the Middle Eastern proletarians (not excluding their Israeli brothers) so that their response to their present problems as well as to the future imperialist war is the proletarian revolution and not its negation, the national democratic path.

Organisational autonomy is the necessary precondition for the more important political autonomy. For this reason every type of "entryist" game must be excluded as it would lead to the annihilation of even those sparse revolutionary minorities which falteringly resist on a class basis.

The old opportunistic position which, as usual is passed off as an intelligent reckoning with reality and is based on the thesis that in situations where they are weak revolutionaries should organisationally and tactically adhere to organs of the bourgeoisie, plainly leads to defeat. To affirm that the PLO or the NSF are bourgeois organs but that at the present juncture there is no alternative and that for the Palestinian proletariat itself the only practical perspective is the nationalist one, does not just mean tailing bourgeois programmes and deceiving the masses about the effective pursuit of their own interests, it also means the destruction (or at least the failure to create) the primary precondition for a future revolutionary transformation. It is precisely because the overwhelming majority of the masses have been captured by bourgeois interests that it is necessary to concentrate all efforts on the construction of an opposing political reference pole which, by working outside and

against bourgeois organisations, can shift the masses' orientation. To renounce this elementary communist principle means renouncing the minimum conditions for the rebirth of the struggle as class struggle. To work for this demands above all organisational autonomy, class tactics and strategy - i.e. a revolutionary party and programme.

Although it is true that the situation of the Palestinian labour force is rather special due to its continuous displacement within the area of the Middle East market, it is also true (admittedly to a lesser extent) that cyclical employment also hits the Jordanian, Egyptian and Syrian proletariat and, before war broke out, Iranian and Iraqi proletarians too. Moreover, conditions of more stable employment produce better opportunities for establishing class alliances and political relations for maturing strategic and tactical unity. Such unity serves not just as the basis for a shaky class solidarity but above all it is a necessary condition for the awakening of revolutionary consciousness both in the ranks of the Palestinian proletariat and in the Middle East proletariat as a whole. Alongside organisational autonomy and political independence the daily work of seeking alliances with other sectors of the Middle Eastern proletariat poses (from a tactical point of view) a double objective: uniting the various and very often contradictory sections of the area's proletariat around a revolutionary programme and drawing the exploited millions who are still subject to nationalist, revolutionary democratic, progressive or theocratic ideologies away from the influence of the local bourgeoisies. But the second of these objectives can only be realised as a consequence of the first. In other words, omitting or renouncing the construction of a communist reference point means that every effort to shift the masses from bourgeois ground towards class objectives will remain purely utopian on the plane of intention, and become counter-revolutionary on the plane of political practice.

We remind those who support such opportunist "concreteness" that the "difficult and utopian" revolutionary path which passes by way of class alliances with the various proletariats of the region has already been travelled, both in Jordan before the ferocious repression of "Black September" and in the Lebanese civil war of '75-76, culminating in the battle of Tel Al Zatar. In both cases the Palestinian masses under arms entered into a kind of political

and military class front with Jordanian and Lebanese proletarians. This is the only path revolutionaries should make an effort to follow whilst remaining aware that such a class alliance must absolutely avoid making the mistake (which was made in both the above cases) of yet again expressing itself in terms of the logic of the bourgeoisie - for a "progressive" "democratic" government. Instead the united proletariat must fight against all bourgeoisies, no matter how camouflaged, for the only possible form of government in its own interests: the dictatorship of the proletariat.

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# Neither Reagan and his allies Nor Gadaffi and his friends

A STATEMENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL BUREAU FOR THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

## WORKERS, COMRADES

Recent events in the Mediterranean have opened up a dramatic new situation in the world: the sounds of war have reached the citadels of Europe. Since the end of the Second World War local conflicts often disguised as wars of national liberation, have characterised the daily existence of the world but in the last year they have increased and become more serious. Until now these conflicts and massacres, though carried out with arms from the metropolitan imperialist countries have been confined to the periphery of the capitalist world. Now a taboo has been broken: they are threatening to involve Europe.

Wars have always been fought under pretexts which have nothing to do with the real reason for the conflict and today is no different. The USA's excuse for launching missiles at a small state like Libya is terrorism. Even the USA's allies are only pretending to believe this arrogant absurdity! But long before they got drunk on Reaganite ideology it was already well-known that the USA wanted to strike at Russian interests in the Middle East, where (especially in Syria) the USSR has recently reaped some notable diplomatic successes in getting its own, equally imperialist hands, on the Middle East.

## WORKERS, COMRADES

Since the foundation of the state of Israel which exists only through the support of Western imperialism and which is opposed by the USSR through the medium of Arab nationalism, there has been a crisis in the Middle East. But today that crisis has worsened and dangerously widened. Added to the traditional rivalry between the USA and USSR is a new clash on interests in the Western bloc. For some time the USA has been pushing for a reduction in the economic links between the EEC and the Arab world. The USA wants that area all to itself. This led to the diplomatic tension between the USA and Europe

and to this attempt by the US to break the link between Europe and the Middle East. At the same time tensions in other areas of the world; in Central America, Asia and Africa, are mounting.

The political, diplomatic and military crises are all a product of the cycle of capital accumulation. The Second World War closed one of these cycles and opened up another. Since the early 70s this cycle has arrived at its period of crisis. And the capitalist crisis, as always, poses only one alternative - either imperialist war or proletarian revolution. The bourgeoisie is now tending towards war but for workers and communists the slogan is

NEITHER REAGAN AND HIS ALLIES  
NOR GHADAFY AND HIS ALLIES

## WORKERS, COMRADES

Throughout the world capitalism has attempted to stave off its profits crisis by attacking the working class. Every government of every political shade (whether Labour, Social Democrat, Conservative, Liberal or military) has used the same policy of reducing wage and unemployment benefit levels and intensifying exploitation. AND STILL THE CRISIS GOES ON! Thus at the same time as attacking the working class every bourgeois bloc or government is also attacking the opposing bloc or bourgeoisie. This is why the political crises are increasing and international tensions are worsening. And in the conflict unleashed by these tensions it is still the working class which pays the highest price since the dead are always workers. This is why the working class MUST NOT LINE UP WITH EITHER SIDE BUT MUST COUNTER ATTACK ON ITS OWN TERRAIN.

## WORKERS, COMRADES

The old counter-revolutionary myths have either collapsed or are in the process of collapsing. The USSR and the so-called socialist countries are not socialist but (state) capitalist like all other countries in the world.



The so-called Communist Parties are not communist but bourgeois, like all other parties which give support to wars in parliaments.

In Poland in 1980, in the great miners strike in Britain, in the French steel industry, in the Tunisian "bread revolt", in the strikes against the war in Iran and Iraq, and in dozens of other episodes, our class has shown, and is still showing its vitality. Our class is alive and is faced with a dramatic choice; either delay breaking out of the ideological, political and trade unionist cage which the previous counter-revolutionary period has woven around it and thus submit to war, massacre and destruction; or, vigorously take up its own struggles again in order to defend itself from capitalism's attacks and to push back all attempts to make it pay for capitalism's crisis. The revival of class struggle is the only way in which capitalist war can be stopped. This must culminate in a revolution which creates a world fit for humanity.

Attacks on wages and jobs must be fought with a determination which takes the struggle beyond the limits of capitalism itself. Workers must respond to bourgeois calls to join its war fronts by striking in defence of their autonomous interests - for decent wages and better living standards.

When the bourgeoisie does launch its war it will demand national unity and solidarity, in short, an end to the class struggle. Such social peace is the ideal condition for imperialist war. Our response must be to

**RELAUNCH THE CLASS STRUGGLE  
STRIKE AND BLOCK ALL PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION  
SMATTER THE SOCIAL PEACE**

**WORKERS, COMRADES**

The immediate class struggle can and must give rise to the revolutionary perspective of socialism: of a new order founded on production linked to human need not profits and based on the organised power of the producers themselves. The condition for the realisation of this perspective is the re-birth and re-inforcement of the party of the communist revolution. The programme of the communist revolution, its strategic and tactical plan for the proletarian assault on bourgeois power, must again become current within our class and must become the reference point for the class struggle.

The revival of the communist programme means a hard and long struggle against the reactionary and opportunist forces which lead the proletarian masses towards bourgeois goals. It means theoretical, political and organisational confrontation with an adversary which is still strong inside the working class.

Capital is international, the proletariat is international and the revolutionary party must be international and centralised with a single programme for the entire world working class. It is in this perspective that the organisations affiliated to the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party are struggling.

**WORKERS, COMRADES**

The IBRP appeals to the whole proletarian vanguard to unite their efforts to relaunch the struggle against the capitalist crisis and the wars it unleashes in a commitment towards building the revolutionary party.

**AID OUR ORGANISATIONS!**

**UNITE WITH THEM!**

The International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party and its affiliated organisations (Internationalist Communist Party - Italy, Communist Workers Organisation - UK, French Committee of the Bureau, Lal Pataka - India.

This leaflet has been given out wherever organisations or sympathisers of the Bureau are to be found and it has been published in Italian, English, French, Bengali, Farsi and Arabic. For further information or more copies for distribution write to the address below.

**APRIL, 1986**



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# The Work of the International Bureau in India

In the last edition of Communist Review we published the 'Open Letter' by the editor of Lal Pataka [Red Flag] to the organisation of which he was a member [Revolutionary Proletarian Platform - RPP] alongside Bureau correspondence with the same organisation. The articles which follow confirm the diverent trajectory of development of both tendencies. On the one hand Lal Pataka has followed the logic of accepting the key points of the IBRP's Platform as the basis for developing a revolutionary nucleus in India by transforming the paper into a theoretical organ sharing the politics of the International Bureau. On the other hand RPP is now struggling to define itself politically against the IBRP and has opportunistically identified itself as standing on the same ground as the Communist Party of Iran, an organisation which not long ago it criticised for its programme of democratic revolution in Kurdistan.

The first article, our critique of RPP's Platform, requires no explanation. The second text in this section is our response to RPP's belated reply to our correspondence of 10.4.85 and 9.5.85. Though unpublished by RPP "for reasons of space", these letters were published along with RPP's previous correspondence in Communist Review #3 [copies still available]. RPP have published the letter we reply to here in two instalments of "private circulation" copies of Proletarian Emancipation [Nos. 3-4 and 5, January-March, 1986]. (Limited numbers of these are available from our UK address or direct from RPP at 21 Hari Building, Dr. Ambedkar

Road, Parel, BOMBAY 400 02, INDIA.)

Last, but not least, the article we are publishing here from the first issue of the new series of Lal Pataka which shows how our comrade had been searching independently for a coherent revolutionary perspective. It is apparent that our correspondence had the impact it did because the perspectives we put forward provided the framework for making sense of an otherwise unintelligible political experience that was in keeping with Lal Pataka's own understanding of Marxism. Thus the relationship between the IBRP and Lal Pataka has been part of a process in which neither Lal Pataka has become what it is now 'independently' of outside influences nor has the International Bureau sought to create a 'section' in India on the simple basis of formal acceptance of our Platform. We therefore warmly welcome Lal Pataka's adhesion to the IBRP, not as the end of the process of political discussion and clarification between us, but as the beginning of a new stage in this process. Henceforward this discussion will be within the context of a single political tendency. Perhaps even more important though, Lal Pataka has now clearly defined its political stance to other revolutionaries in India and has put forward a set of principles as the starting point for the development of a revolutionary marxist nucleus there. We sincerely hope that the entreaty to build a nucleus in India does not go unheeded by those who wish to see the establishment of a revolutionary organisation in India today.

# 'Revolutionary Proletarian Platform' : A Statement of Confusion and Prevarication on National and International Issues

## PREFACE

When a political group came to our notice with a draft Platform whose aim was to "form a basis for discussion with other Marxist-Leninist groups and individuals working in different parts of India and elsewhere" [p.1] and when that Platform declared that the present historical period is one of socialist revolution [p.16] in a crisis-ridden world which consists of "one integrated world capitalistic system" divided into "two opposing militarist power blocs" [p.8]; when it stated unambiguously that the "Indian Stalinist and Maoist parties though they swear by Marx and Lenin and internationalism, favour India joining with the war bloc associated with USSR or China ... do not believe that only socialist revolutions in the country and the world at large can prevent imperialist world war ... They do not preach the Marxist-Leninist theory of converting the imperialist war into civil war and revolution" [pp. 10-11]; and moreover when it argued that "Nowhere in the world any of the so-called communist parties having various labels and owing allegiance either to USSR or Red China is extending any support to the cause of socialist revolution" [p.11] the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party welcomed it to the proletarian camp - i.e. to those of us who seek to defend the interests of the international working class against all existing states and so-called Communist or Marxist-Leninist parties. And, unlike certain other organisations

in this camp who were not slow to see the shortcomings and confusions of the RPP as a sign of its outright counter-revolutionary nature, the IBRP initiated correspondence on the assumption that, through political dialogue and discussion, there was a potential for RPP to achieve greater political clarity.

RPP responded to our introductory letter in September 1984 by agreeing to an exchange of their English language publications and a mutual criticisms of positions, given the apparently substantial area of agreement between us. At the same time we also received RPP's Draft Policy Statement but agreed to withhold criticism until we received their 'definitive' statement which was being published after acceptance at its first All-India Conference in August 1984. However, it was not until August the following year that we received this long-awaited document - by which time RPP itself had had to face serious criticisms of its Platform from within. The initial thrusts in the debate between the IBRP and RPP had hardly been made when this resulted in disagreement among the members of RPP's Executive Committee on how to reply to the Bureau. While we waited for their reply the attempts by the majority in the EC to "gag" its dissident members and prevent the issues from being discussed inside the organisation as a whole led to political and organisational crisis for the RPP. On the one hand Lal Pataka [Red Flag] in Bengal was excluded after arguing that RPP's Platform was not a

suitable basis for the organisation to reach a clear proletarian standpoint; it was not simply that the Policy Statement was confused or mistaken on certain points but that the method behind the Platform was basically unMarxist and therefore could not provide the necessary framework for a revolutionary organisation. Instead Lal Pataka argued inside the EC of RPP, and then in an Open Letter to the organisation as a whole, that the RPP should adopt the seven basic principles adopted by the IBRP as criteria for the International Conferences of the Communist Left as the basis for a new platform.[1] On the other hand RPP also had to face criticisms which may be described as 'right-wing' from inside its own EC - from comrades who argued that the socialist revolution will be the culmination of a series of "democratic revolutions" and who finally resigned when their criticisms went unanswered. Though reaching very different political conclusions, these two splits by leading members of RPP maintained several points in common about RPP as an organisation. Both, for instance, stressed RPP's lack of a Marxist method and both gave evidence of the gagging tactics by the majority of the EC and hence the impossibility of genuine political debate inside the organisation as a whole. This is an important point. It emphasises the fact that the organisation question is a political question and it reveals RPP's practice as having more in common with Stalinism than democratic centralism. The professed willingness to discuss in the Draft Policy Statement of 1981 was denied in practice by the majority of the Executive's refusal to tolerate political questioning in 1985. By the time we received the final version of Revolutionary Proletarian Platform the organisation of that name was already beginning to retreat on crucial issues and the Lal Pataka comrade had written his Open Letter to RPP [2]. Yet RPP still remains and in "private circulation" copies of Proletarian Emancipation [revived in this form in November 1985 after a lapse of 6 months][3] has declared its intention to:

"conduct a relentless struggle against the ICC, IBRP, and such other organisations who are out to spread anarchism and petty-bourgeois reformism among the working class instead of leading the working class movement along the correct path of revolutionary Marxism-Leninism." [Proletarian Emancipation #2 - December 1985]

This particular ideological battle is not yet

over. By this critique of RPP's Policy Statement we aim to show that it is inadequate as a basis for building a revolutionary Marxist organisation in India. We hope it will inspire discussion amongst serious comrades in India, both inside and outside RPP.

[1] Regular readers of the IBRP press will be familiar with the part our arguments have played in influencing the emergence and development of this tendency and of the subsequent work of the Lal Pataka comrades to establish a clear Marxist focal point from the variety of individuals and groups awakening to Marxism in India.

[2] A month later he was to be summarily "suspended" from the Platform on the trumped-up grounds of financial and organisational dishonesty without any attempt to confront the political issues raised.

[3] It is symptomatic of RPP's mode of operation that this 6 months' lapse, their inability to continue unfinished articles from previous issues, is announced as "due to some unavoidable problems of changing the place of publication, editorial board, etc." - i.e. No political explanation is given and the reader is expected to believe there has been no political crisis. [See Proletarian Emancipation #2 private circulation series, November 1985].

## INTRODUCTION

Any political organisation which claims to base itself on a revolutionary proletarian platform must be able to clearly demonstrate the principles it defends and how these represent the interests of the international proletariat today. By employing Marxist method such a platform must synthesise and incorporate the lessons of the last revolutionary wave [and the experience of the international class struggle since then] in order to outline the basic framework for political activity and posit a programme for action. An essential prerequisite for such an endeavour is a thorough grasp of Marxist method [historical and dialectical materialism] in order to understand the overall objective circumstances of the historical period we are living in. This is not to argue for an idiosyncratic, new interpretation of Marxism. On the contrary, it means building on the lessons of the past - both the work of revolutionaries and the experience of the class struggle. Marxists have a rich heritage to defend but it is a



heritage which has been broken and distorted over the last sixty years.

With the defeat of the last revolutionary wave Marxism all but disappeared under the weight of Stalinist ideology. 'Communism' and 'Marxism' became almost entirely synonymous with the defence of the USSR. Following their namesake, all the Trotskyist oppositions had this feature in common. Later the emergence of Maoism as a supposedly Marxist doctrine abandoned a basic Marxist principle altogether - the necessity for the proletarian party's political independence from the bourgeoisie - in favour of a multi-class alliance. With Mao 'Marxism' became the ideology of nationalism.

Today, more than ever, it is clearly not enough for an organisation to proclaim itself the true heirs of Marx, Engels and Lenin. If Marx, during his lifetime was moved by the activities of some of his misguided followers to say "if this is Marxism, then I am not a Marxist"; the existence of a myriad self-proclaimed 'Marxist' organisations today means that the validity of their claim has to be judged on more than their ability to quote Marx or Lenin. Any revolutionary organisation today is faced with the task of reaffirming Marxism as a science: of pitting scientific Marxism against the 'Marxists' and in so doing elaborating the starting point for independent political activity on the part of today's proletariat: a class which for more than sixty years has been under the ideological and organisational hold of the counter-revolution.

Thus the lessons we draw from the last revolutionary wave and its defeat are crucial. That the Russian Revolution was defeated by virtue of its isolation is a truism for all who aspire to defend Marxism. But the lessons vary according to the different analyses. If we are to establish a clear basis for revolutionary political work today there is no room for ambiguity or blurring of edges in relation to our interpretation of history.

#### RPP AND THE LESSONS OF HISTORY

With this in mind, let us turn to Revolutionary Proletarian Platform, i.e. RPP's "Statement of Policy on National and International Questions". This document is divided into three parts - a Preface followed by sections on the International and then the National Situation. The Preface is in fact a telescoped account of the defeat of the Russian Revolution and its consequences,

particularly taking into account the implications for India. But, like the major part of the text, the precise lessons RPP have drawn for proletarian politics today remain unclear. For much of the time the reader must deduce and imply from a document which therefore hardly lives up to its title of "Statement of Policy". So what does RPP's potted overview of history enable us to conclude?

To its credit the Platform begins by describing (after Lenin) the present era as one of "imperialism, imperialistic war and armed proletarian socialist revolutions"[p.1] and (again, following Lenin) the Russian Revolution is correctly depicted as a socialist revolution which was isolated by the defeat of proletarian revolutions elsewhere. The Preface concludes by stressing the need for the proletariat in India and the rest of the world, faced with the possibility of 3rd World War and the ripened material and objective conditions for revolution, to organise independently. While the "revolutionary theory of Marxism-Leninism has been lost in the quagmire of the Stalinist-Maoist-Trotskyist distortions" "... the objective material conditions demand from the class-conscious revolutionaries that they organise themselves very soon into a revolutionary nucleus so that the proletariat may be brought out of the influence of the anti-revolutionaries and be organised into a class-organisation in the spirit of a revolutionary army and may succeed in re-establishing revolutionary Marxism-Leninism so that they may find themselves well prepared in appropriate time." The passage ends, "Long Live Proletarian Internationalism" [p.8]. So far so good. We can only solidarise with these fundamental planks for any revolutionary platform. We may also add here that we do not underestimate the significance of this avowed aim to re-establish revolutionary Marxism from an organisation in a peripheral area of capitalism where would-be revolutionaries have known nothing but "Stalinist-Maoist-Trotskyist distortions" and nothing of the fight of the communist left in Europe to maintain revolutionary Marxism.

#### ... Confusion and Contradictions on the Russian Revolution

But RPP have made it clear that they have ended discussion on the Platform and moreover, the organisation now sees itself as the defender of 'true' Marxism-Leninism, now including the IBRP amongst its political enemies. Yet a closer look at the Platform undermines RPP's claim.

Take, for example, the crucial question of the defeat of the Russian Revolution. Initially RPP's narrative focuses on the isolation of the proletarian revolution in an "underdeveloped backward country" where "none except Lenin had a complete scientific world outlook" [p.2]. As the narrative continues the theme of bad leaders and wrong policies (Lenin's fight against bureaucracy, the treachery of Stalin and vacillation and opportunism of Trotsky) takes over to explain the development of state monopoly capitalism in Russia and the conversion of "the world working-class movement into a tail-end of the foreign policy of Russia". The facts of this narrative cannot be doubted, but what has happened to the historical materialist method? Instead of objective circumstances imposing the state capitalist road on the Bolshevik Party, obliging it to become the instrument for the development of state capitalist relations - i.e. the counter-revolution, RPP gives us bad leadership and in so doing has subtly turned Marxism on its head. This is not a pedantic formality. By focussing on symptoms rather than underlying causes, by substituting idealism for historical materialism, RPP:

- a) avoids having to even consider the question of party-class, party-state relationships and in fact the whole issue of the party's relation to the mass of the working class during the counter-revolution;
- b) opens up the possibility of socialism in one country: the antipathy of proletarian internationalism.

Evidently RPP is against "socialism in one country" yet the weakness inherent in their method means that an unwitting reader of the Platform may not rule it out. For instance, if the Revolution had not been isolated in a backward country where "petty-bourgeois property relations and ideological wave [sic] predominated" and "where the material-technical conditions for building a socialist society were not adequately developed" (this is RPP's concession to a materialist explanation) but in a more advanced country; and if Stalin's treachery had been opposed by more than the vacillation and opportunism of Trotsky ... would it have been possible for socialism to have developed in a single country? Such hypothetical changes in historical circumstance are not the province of Marxists and RPP's Platform does not go so far as to indulge in such speculation. Yet it speaks of the Comintern being "disgracefully" abolished [p.3] by Stalin during the Second

World War (as if it could have been revived as a revolutionary force long after it had come under the complete control of Russia and had ceased to be revolutionary) or of the USSR making alliances with Nazi Germany and Allied Imperialism instead of relying "on the the strength and solidarity of international working class for its safety and security"[p.10] (as if the state monopoly capitalist state which RPP admits the USSR had become could have chosen the latter course). What else can one make of this except that with a different leadership the Russian CP could have survived without developing capitalist relations in Russia in the Thirties?

Throughout the narrative it seems RPP has not recognised a process of counter-revolution which occurred not just in Russia but through once-revolutionary Europe. The Russian hold over the Comintern which developed from the imposition of the United Front policy on its constituent parties in 1922, through 'Bolshevisation' of the organisation in the Twenties, the obligation to accept 'socialism in one country' (at the 6th Congress, 1928), right up to the adoption of the Popular Front policy and defence of 'democracy' is part and parcel of that process which involved expelling or silencing any voice independent of the Moscow line in the parties of the Comintern. By the time Stalin was in a position to dissolve the Comintern there was nothing revolutionary left inside it.

By the same token RPP's failure to situate Stalinism and the development of Russia as a state capitalist power unambiguously in the context of the defeat of the international working class leads them to pose reliance on "the strength and solidarity of the international working class" as an alternative foreign policy for Russia in the Thirties. And here RPP has fallen into the trap of the Stalinism it aims to oppose. By implicitly reducing the necessity of the international revolution to the survival of the USSR RPP has in fact adopted the counter-revolutionary framework of Stalinism: defence of the Russian state as the priority. - And this more than a decade after the Russian Revolution had been isolated by the defeat of the European revolution! RPP's criticisms of Russia become no more than regret that the policies of the '3rd Period' (1928-35) were discontinued.[1]

... The Democratic Revolution:  
the Confusion is Compounded

This interpretation may not be the intention of RPP. The fact that it is possible is testimony to the confusion and weakness of their method - a weakness which is compounded when the Platform comes to the question of the democratic revolution. According to RPP's scenario the Russian Revolution began as a bourgeois revolution which, due to Lenin's faithful adhesion to Marx in organising the Bolshevik Party as an independent proletarian party, was transformed into a proletarian socialist revolution when the Bolshevik Party gained its leadership.

"In a semi-feudal, semi-capitalist Czarist Russia, Lenin had organised the Bolshevik Party as a purely proletarian party. He had put forward the theory that neither the bourgeoisie was capable of completing the bourgeois democratic revolution nor was it in the interest of the bourgeoisie to do so. Hence it is necessary in the interest of the Proletariat that it takes the leadership of this revolution in its own hands and in alliance with the peasantry to complete it in a revolutionary way. Only if the Proletariat succeeds in this task, would it be in a position to convert the bourgeois democratic revolution into a proletarian socialist revolution at an earliest to the extent possible"(sic) [pp4-5].

Like other organisations who claim to be defending 'Marxism-Leninism' against right and left 'deviations' this analysis totally ignores how Lenin actually saw the Russian Revolution in 1917 and his fight within the Party to establish that the Revolution the Party must set itself to lead was no less than a socialist revolution (which is not synonymous with the revolutionary completion of the bourgeois revolution). His struggle against the Old Bolsheviks was not conducted in terms of the need to transform an uncompleted bourgeois revolution into a socialist revolution in order to complete its democratic tasks. On the contrary, he was arguing for the resolution of dual power in favour of the Soviets - i.e. for the completion of the socialist revolution. This was the whole thrust of Lenin's articles and speeches during April/May 1917. In the April Theses He had written:

"...the bourgeois or the bourgeois democratic revolution in Russia is completed. The person who now speaks only of a "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" is behind the times,

consequently he has in effect gone over to the petty bourgeoisie against the proletarian class struggle."

And throughout the dual power period he was at pains to distinguish proletarian democracy from the democracy of the Provisional Government. Thus, in The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution he argued for the:

"... pouring of vinegar and bile into the sweet water of revolutionary democratic phraseology"

and in his Report to the Party Congress (April 24th 1917) explained that:

"We studiously avoid the words "revolutionary democracy". We may use them when there is a question of an attack by the government, but at the present moment they are highly deceptive, for it is very difficult to distinguish the classes which have mingled in this chaos." [Sel. Works Vol.2 p.68]

Clearly, when Lenin used the term "democratic republic" his goal was not the democratic republic of the classical bourgeois revolution.

"We aim at a republic in which the whole power of the state, from top to bottom belongs exclusively and entirely to the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers and Peasants' deputies." [Coll. Wks. Vol.XX p.59]

Despite the ideological hangovers from a previous epoch which still plagued the Bolshevik Party, it is a mistake to see the Russian Revolution as the completion of the bourgeois democratic revolution. From February the Revolution, arising out of the collapse of the Army on the imperialist war fronts and the masses' demand for bread, was implicitly proletarian. That the Russian bourgeoisie was weak and that the majority of the proletariat was initially without a clear communist leadership there is no doubt. But the October Revolution represents the victory of soviet power over the claim of the Constituent Assembly; of proletarian democracy over bourgeois democracy. This is not the completion of the bourgeois democratic revolution but the overthrow of bourgeois power by a new, proletarian state power.[2]

RPP's mistaken interpretation of the Russian Revolution has serious consequences for the tasks the Platform assigns to both the communist party and the proletariat as a whole today.

These errors are compounded by RPP's failure to digest the significance of the epoch which was opened up by the 1st World War.

Thus, though RPP stands for the necessity for an independent communist party it sees one of the tasks of this party (in unspecified areas outside the capitalist metropolises) as being to carry the bourgeois democratic revolution to its limits, thereby furthering the cause of the socialist revolution. The Communist Party of India, for instance, is criticised for betraying "the revolutionary forces" during the Independence movement in the Forties - not because siding with British Imperialism "in the name of anti-Fascism, in the name of unity with democratic forces" meant abandoning the terrain of class struggle and proletarian internationalism, but because it weakened "the militant trend in the Bourgeois Democratic Revolution"!

"By this betrayal of the cause of the national war of liberation i.e. the Indian Bourgeois Democratic Revolution, it pushed away the cause of the proletarian socialist revolution and deformed the Bourgeois Democratic Revolution." [p.5]

In a similar vein the Chinese CP under Mao Tse-Tung is criticised for not organising as an independent political forces and therefore of being incapable of "taking the leadership of this [bourgeois democratic] revolution in the absence of adequate working class organisation" [p.6]. But it is totally unMarxist to speak of the proletariat leading the bourgeois democratic revolution when the objective situation is ripe for proletarian revolution. The Russian Revolution clearly demonstrates in practice that the tasks of the proletariat in its international revolution are quite distinct and opposed to the interests of the national bourgeoisie which are tied to the interests of imperialism. More than anything else, the Bolshevik Party was the only party to maintain political independence from the national bourgeoisie by its consistent stand against the imperialist war. To have followed the old line of completing the bourgeois democratic revolution would have meant abandoning the policy of fraternisation and revolutionary defeatism at best for a policy of neutrality.

The arrival of capitalism's imperialist epoch - the epoch of wars and revolutions - means that the classical bourgeois democratic revolution

is no longer on the historical agenda. The historical role of the democratic revolution Marx wrote about was essentially to consolidate the "nation" by overthrowing reactionary aristocratic rule and thereby removing feudal economic, social and political barriers to the development of the national capital. For Marx, of course, this was not an end in itself: the development of capitalism meant also the development of capitalism's gravedigger: the industrial proletariat. In this sense Marxist recognise that the classical bourgeois revolution was historically progressive. Today, in the imperialist epoch, would-be Marxists interpret the attempts by national capitals outside of the capitalist heartlands to liberate themselves from imperialism as equivalent to the classical bourgeois democratic revolution against feudalism. But the very fact that the world today is divided by imperialism, from whose domination no peripheral state can escape, means that such a national, democratic revolution is obsolete. It is not simply that each local bourgeoisie is weak; it is rather that the subservience of these peripheral states to imperialism means that the local bourgeoisie is obliged to act as an integral part of international capital if it is to survive as a capitalist class (by accepting the conditions of international loans, investing in profitable areas regardless of the "national interest", etc., etc.). Much less than a force for "national liberation", the interests of the local bourgeoisie are bound up with the existence of imperialism. The only possible option open to them is the 'choice' of which imperialist power bloc to align with: a change of masters is a far cry from national liberation. In short, liberation from imperialism by a national revolution is impossible.

Only in a situation of world-wide proletarian revolution is it possible to conceive of a "national struggle" - i.e. a popular movement of the toiling masses - contributing to the demise of international imperialism by linking up with the international proletarian revolution. This is the framework of the debates in the IIIrd International on the national and colonial questions in 1919-20. And if the Comintern failed to resolve the question of how far the anti-colonial struggle of the masses had to be also a conscious socialist struggle today there is no room for ambiguity about the role of the communist party in a popular anti-imperialist movement. Our task is not to fan the flames of nationalism but to raise the banner of proletarian internationalism and



lead the struggle onto the terrain of the world proletariat.

### A World Ripe for Revolution: Bourgeois or Proletarian?

But when we come to RPP's section on the "International Situation" we are presented with no such clarity. Despite their recognition that the material conditions "have now ripened for capitalism ... to be overthrown forever from the face of the earth"[p.29] (though only since the 2nd World War and not from the 1st World War!); despite their understanding of the invalidity of "two" and "three world" theories since the world is divided into two equally imperialist blocs [e.g. p.12 and p.15]; despite their acknowledgment that "the world crisis is deepening and there is no solution to the crisis within the capitalist structure of the existing states"[p.10]; all this does not mean that national liberation is an obsolete aim. Instead, the fact that national liberation movements throughout the world become pawns of one or other imperialism is explained away by their not having grown out of the class struggle and not having a working class leadership "... and consequently these movements are inherently weak and they ultimately depend upon foreign assistance for survival which in its turn open them to the super-power rivalry games and degeneration, leading to assassinations, toppling of regimes and forcible removal of leaderships, etc."[p.16]. Once again RPP has turned Marxism on its head. Instead of condemning those nationalist organisations who exist to divert the class struggle in the periphery onto national grounds, it looks for the national struggle to emerge out of the class struggle! Moreover, at the same time as describing how national liberation struggles become pawns of imperialism the Platform regrets the rifts in the PLO and Arafat's withdrawal from Lebanon which "have weakened the fighting capacity of the PLO against Israel". We may add that even within RPP's own terms such a statement is incongruous since, according to them, it is the task of the communist party to lead the national struggle! In any case support for the creation of a Palestinian state and the destruction of Israel only subordinates the struggle of the Palestinian proletariat to the interests of the existing Arab states and thereby to the existing inter-imperialist conflicts in the Middle East. Communist leadership for the Palestinian working class no less than for the rest of the world's working class,

means building a unified revolutionary struggle of the working class as a whole in the Middle East (including Israel) and beyond. The "uprisings against economic exploitations and suppressions" [sic, p.16] which are being throttled by Western and Russian imperialism alike and which RPP sees as the basis for a genuine national liberation struggle are rather the basis for unifying the working class throughout the world.

With a methodology which allows the possibility of successful national struggles today and even makes it a task of communists to lead the national movement the way is open for RPP to abandon proletarian internationalism altogether. And this is precisely what happened in Proletarian Emancipation #6 where revolutionary defeatism is still regarded as the correct 'policy' for communists in the imperialist metropolises in the event of war. But for the proletariat and communists outside these areas defence of the nation against imperialism becomes the correct course of action. According to RPP's latest interpretation of Marxism-Leninism:

"Revolutionary proletarian parties of oppressor imperialist nations are duty bound to support the struggle for self-determination of the people of the oppressed nations against their own imperialist bourgeoisie. At the same time the duty of the revolutionary proletarian parties of the oppressed nations consists in not only raising the demand themselves but when the demand for self-determination is raised by the bourgeoisie they should explain to the masses the real intentions of the bourgeoisie behind the demand."[p.7]

By its own dangerously confused methodology RPP has undermined its own case for revolutionary defeatism - and all in the name of Leninism! In fact it is symptomatic of RPP's development away from proletarian internationalism that revolutionary defeatism is only given a passing mention as part of their criticism of Maoist and Stalinist parties in India. Thus, we learn in passing on page 45 that revolutionary defeatism is a basic principle for revolutionaries when RPP criticises these organisations for having "completely renounced the revolutionary policy of converting the imperialist world war into civil war and revolution". This cursory mention is actually a step back from RPP's Draft Platform where the necessity for communists everywhere to carry on the revolutionary struggle, during local wars as well as during world war, is

central. For instance on page 11 of the Draft the Stalinists and Maoists are criticised because:

"They do not believe that only socialist revolutions in the country and the world at large can prevent imperialist world war. They do not try to understand that India's joining any of the power blocs would only further the cause of the imperialistic designs of world war. They do not preach the Marxist-Leninist theory of converting the imperialist war into civil war and revolution. In case of war they do not carry out a wholehearted revolutionary struggle but to evade such a struggle they resort to so-called 'Marxist' excuses";

while on page 20 we read:

"The so-called wars, toppling of Governments, liberation struggles, etc. that are taking place in Africa, Asia and Latin America are all due to the power games of the super powers. In view of the above situation in India and abroad, Revolutionary Marxists cannot sit idle, they must act resolutely and act immediately by taking such steps and programmes which will frustrate the global war and promote the victory of the world armed proletarian socialist revolution in India and in all the capitalist countries of the world. Revolutionary Marxists should follow the Leninist line which may be quoted as under:

"Good people often forget the brutal and savage setting of the imperialist world war. This setting does not tolerate phrases and mocks at innocent and pious wishes. There is one and only one kind of internationalism in deed. Working wholeheartedly for the development of the revolutionary struggle in one's own country and supporting (by propaganda, sympathy and material aid) such, and only such a struggle and such a line in every country without exception. Everything else is deception and Manilovism (sentimental day-dreaming)."  
[Lenin: The Tasks of the Proletariat in our Revolution.]"

No talk here of national liberation movements being subject to imperialism because they have not developed the class struggle.

But in the 'definitive' version of the Platform there is no such moment of clarity. We have

seen how the methodology behind this document allows the possibility of successful national liberation struggles today. In the past RPP has criticised the Communist Party of Iran for its advocacy of a "democratic revolution" in Kurdistan and yet such a criticism does not follow from RPP's own method. Not surprisingly therefore, RPP now finds it is closer to the CPIRan than almost any other tendency. What is more surprising is that RPP could not tolerate the view that the international proletarian revolution will be the result of a series of democratic revolutions inside its own ranks. But then, the EC member (and editor of Proletarian Emancipation) who argued thus also demanded a more rigorous method on the part of the organisation! Confusion is heaped on confusion. In terms of the Platform, the reader who is prepared to wade through RPP's often facile, sometimes inaccurate and misleading narrative on the international situation (e.g. "Imperialistic economic point of view (i.e. Reaganomics) has penetrated the IMF and the World Bank too!" [p.27]) will find it offers, not a clear guide to the international tasks of communists today but political confusion, contradictions and concessions to nationalism.

#### RPP ON THE "NATIONAL SITUATION"

At the end of the day RPP's failure to grasp the full implications of the imperialist epoch and to draw lessons about the nature of the party from this and the whole process of the counter-revolution leads it back to the mentality of the 2nd International. For the 2nd International each 'national' communist party had its own programme while the International itself had no binding control over its constituent parties: its resolutions remained for the most part empty declarations because it did not function as the executive organ of a single international party. Its conferences were the occasion for the exchange of ideas rather than the framing of an international revolutionary programme. The betrayal of the parties of the 2nd International with their support for their own governments on the outbreak of World War in 1914 and later the conversion of the 3rd International into an arm of the Russian state emphasise the necessity for a unified, international party of the proletariat where the local organisations are strong enough to resist any future attempt at a form of "Bolshevisation" and which at the same time acts as a unified and united whole. The fact that the world today is divided by imperialism; that capitalism is the predominant mode of production worldwide

and that therefore the material pre-condition exists for world revolution ~~means~~ that the objective basis also exists for ~~such~~ an international party with a single, revolutionary programme.

But the reader of the last section of RPP's Platform could be forgiven for not suspecting that the collapse of Social Democracy in 1914 or the counter-revolution of the last sixty years and more held any implications for the nature of the international party of the proletariat we have to create and for the task of building the nucleus of such a party today.

While any Marxist organisation has to frame concrete policies in its own local area RPP's section on the "National Situation" in India reflects this outmoded, essentially Social Democratic perspective. Thus, even the Platform's recognition that India is a capitalist state where the task of communists is to work for a socialist, not a bourgeois democratic revolution, is undermined when, as we have seen, the historical world-view behind this leads to the conclusion that in other areas of the globe it is the task of communists to work for a bourgeois democratic revolution.[5]

#### Attempts to Revive Social Democracy ...

In fact, by its attempt to lay the basis for the formation of an "All-India Revolutionary Party of the working class based on the comprehensive Marxist-Leninist philosophical, ideological, practical and organisational principles"[p.46] - which have never been clearly stated in the Platform but rather have been taken as read - RPP only further reveals its unhistorical and unMarxist approach to political and organisational questions which lead it to a kind of sclerosis. It is as if the 1st World War - the bankruptcy of Social Democracy and the old working class reformist organisations; even the way the counter-revolution (in the form of Stalinism and state capitalist ideology) infuses the working class - had not changed anything for the revolutionary organisation. And apparently this is the case for RPP. It is not that RPP does not see the need to overthrow the existing state (it does) nor that it mistakes Maoist, Stalinist organisations et.al. for socialist (it doesn't). It is rather that the Platform assumes that a revolutionary party can be built in relative isolation in India and that it will take on essentially the same form as the old Social Democratic Parties in

Europe - i.e. a gradual build-up of a mass working class party. This is most apparent in the passage on parliamentarism [pp.38-39] where the Platform honourably defend the Marxist principle that the working class cannot lay hold of the existing state machine. It goes on to outline how "every revolutionary Marxist party" should take advantage of parliamentary elections to "educate and organise the masses" and that "its winning candidates play the role of revolutionary opposition in the bourgeois parliamentary institutions ..." The issue here is not that revolutionaries should cling to an idealist moral principle and refuse to utilise parliament and parliamentary elections if tactically appropriate. The issue is that without a mass reformist base, without the "support" of working class reformist organisations the development of a mass organisation capable of utilising parliament in the old sense is impossible. And today the conditions for such organisations (whether Social Democratic-style parties of trade unions) to defend the interests of the working class no longer exist. The old working class movement in Europe is dead and it cannot be revived in India or anywhere else.[6]

On the question of the trade unions this revised Platform says curiously little. - Especially considering the amount of space given to them in the draft which argued not only that revolutionaries must work within them but even suggested that the unions could become the basis for revolutionary work. ("True Marxists are required to work with the TUs not to become its secretaries but to elevate the working class trade union politics to the stage of revolutionary Marxist-Leninist politics", p.25 of Draft.) This was accompanied by the incredibly non-Marxist statement that "The trade unions are often susceptible to economism ..." on the same page. The revised Platform is careful not to repeat these absurdities and restricts itself to stating that Leftist forces have "destroyed the class unity of the proletariat by forming dozens of rival unions in every factory and industry"[p.37] whilst later stating that RPP's policy is to work inside the unions "without getting involved in the competition for posts in the trade unions and other legal institutions". It would be wishful thinking on our part if we interpreted this latter statement as RPP having grasped the nettle of how to organise in the working class in the present epoch when trade unions exist to defend the interests of capital against the working class. We know that RPP does not accept this.[7] What the present Platform

does not say, however, is that RPP calls for the formation of a single union to unite the Indian proletariat: not so much a "Marxist-Leninist organisational principle" as a syndicalist one!

Nevertheless this is not mentioned in the Platform whose final list of "organisational, tactical and agitational policies" begins to resemble Social Democracy's 'minimum programme' with its directive to organise agricultural workers and poor peasants "to end every type of private ownership of land and to declare it as national property and to end the buying and selling of land ... Transform big ownership of land and very big capitalist farms without compensation into state farms or co-operative farms of agricultural labourers ... To specially organise a movement of unemployed youth and workers on the question of implementing 4 hours working day and production in 6 shifts without deductions in wages." [p.47] While the first of these are nothing less than attempts to reform the existing state and would only lead to its strengthening if implemented, the last two end up doing the same thing when they are put forward in a platform in this way, outside of agitation in a specific struggle. Apart from the mistaken belief that state capitalist measures are a step towards socialism, to place tactical policies beside others, such as that of organising "to oppose all imperialist war camps and preparation for war, so that in appropriate time it may be converted into socialist revolution" [p.48] is to fail to recognise that the juxtaposition of tactical demands with programmatic aims is to fall into the outmoded maximum/minimum programme mentality of the Second International.

It goes without saying that any revolutionary party must be able to formulate and agitate ~~and~~ concrete demands in order to lead the struggle forward. But these will vary according to the specific situation and conditions of struggle in each local area: they cannot be incorporated into a platform or, indeed, into the future programme of the international proletariat for the very reason that they are adopted for tactical reasons in particular situations whereas the function of a platform is to outline our programmatic principles which apply to the international class struggle as a whole. RPP's list of tactical demands is therefore not only out of place but contains a mixture of fundamental revolutionary principles, possibly utilisable tactics and other demands which

are positively counter-revolutionary in that they imply that the capitalist state can be used in the interests of the working masses. In a word, this section is confused. Like the Platform as a whole it fails to recognise that Marxism is a science, a theoretical and analytical tool for determining the revolutionary course of action in changed historical conditions - not a set of ready-made precepts whose 'purity' is to be maintained like a religious dogma. As our comrade of Lal Pataka argued in the Open Letter to RPP Last July, the inconsistencies and absence of a coherent Marxist method behind the Platform mean that:

"It has got caught up in a process of sclerosis. A cadaver of its discrete ~~doctrines~~ <sup>doctrines</sup>. Therefore it will be a mere waste of time and loss of energy to, in vain, mould a few 'incarnators' into Marxists. Instead we should employ all our efforts and available elements to restructuring a new platform with a view to forming a nucleus of a revolutionary proletarian party, in the course of which political confrontations and collaborations will become the real tasks to be performed ... Hence we propose to restructure our Platform in India in collaboration with the IBRP ...

- 1) Recognition of the revolution of October 1917 in Russia as proletarian.
- 2) Recognition of the break mad with social democracy in the first two congresses of the 3rd International.
- 3) Complete rejection of state capitalism and self-management.
- 4) Rejection of all present communist and socialist parties as bourgeois.
- 5) An orientation towards an organisation of revolutionaries which bases itself on the doctrine and method of Marxism which it recognises as the science of the working class.
- 6) Rejection of all possibility of subordinating the proletariat to the national bourgeoisie.
- 7) Recognition of the organising role of the party in the daily struggle of the working class as well as in the revolution itself." [Communist Review #3 p.40]

For his pains the comrade was expelled without any internal discussion being allowed to take place. It was not our intention that this should be the case. We hope now that this critique will inspire other comrades, both inside and

outside RPP, to raise the political issues outlined here and in so doing join the growing body of revolutionaries in India who recognise that no organisation has the monopoly of Marxist-Leninist truth: that for a coherent and viable Marxist nucleus to become established in India a much deeper debate is required yet.

IBRP, May 1986

#### Footnotes to the article

[1] It is perhaps not surprising therefore that RPP now confesses to being closest to a group which stands "in opposition to the reformist and collaborationist 7th Congress of the CI which has dominated communist politics ever since". - Organisation for a Marxist-Leninist Workers' Party (USA): quoted from their letter to RPP, published in Proletarian Emancipation #2 (private circulation series) and left without comment in RPP's reply of solidarity with them.

[2] For an elaboration of this analysis, see the CWO's article, "The Democratic Revolution, A Programme for the Past" in Revolutionary Perspectives #20.

[3] A more developed explanation of these points and the arguments which follow on the national question can be found in the PCInt's "Theses on the Tasks of Communists in Capitalism's Periphery" in Communist Review #3. Available from any of the IBRP addresses.

[4] The organisations of the IBRP and the Bureau as a whole have published several criticisms of the CPIRan's politics and programme. Many of these are now available in Farsi in #1 of Internationalist Notes. Write to any of the IBRP addresses for further details.

[5] In fact the reasoning behind RPP's view that India is capitalist today is not that capitalist relations dominate the entire globe as a result of imperialism. Rather RPP is under the illusion that the granting of political independence to India represented the completion of the bourgeois democratic revolution by the Indian bourgeoisie - albeit in an "inadequate" and "despicable" way, due to the betrayal of the CPI(Stalinist) and socialist parties whose treachery allowed the partition of the Indian sub-continent [See pp.31-32] and "prevented the Indian working class from playing its revolutionary role in the struggle against British Imperialism." While it is true that the Indian masses were without proletarian leadership in the turmoil associated with Independence it is misguided to suppose that it was their task to lead the national struggle when the interests of Indian capitalism were already

inextricably bound to international capital - even without the colonial framework. While the partition of the sub-continent in 1947 reflected the further demise of Britain as a leading imperialist power it also marked the opening up of India to both US and later Russian capital.

[6] We are not saying that the condition of the working class is exactly the same in countries like India. As we argue in the Theses on the periphery (See footnote 3) the fact that Social Democratic and Leftist ideology has a relatively weak hold over the masses in the peripheral areas, combined with growing absolute poverty which accompanies the crisis and which is driving the masses to revolt, opens up the possibility of revolutionary organisations gaining a much wider following than in the metropolises. However, this is not to say that the conditions exist for the old social democratic concept of the party (a combination of reformist and revolutionary aims) to be implemented again.

[7] See, for example, our reply to RPP which follows this article and previous correspondence between the IBRP and RPP published in Communist Review #3.

## **REVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVES**

75 pence

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*Theoretical Journal of the Communist Workers Organisation*



*Plus - Tertianisation : A Contemporary Myth*

# Letter to RPP

15.6.86

Dear Comrades,

We have postponed our response to your letter of 4.3.86 [1] until completing our critique of your Platform. Unfortunately your letter only confirms our criticisms of the Platform and further reveals the unhistorical and sterile nature of your 'Marxism' which has finally led to your announcement to "conduct a relentless struggle against the ICC, IBRP and such other organisations who are out to spread anarchism and petty bourgeois reformism among the working class instead of leading the working class movement along the correct path of revolutionary M-L" (page 4b of Proletarian Emancipation #2 December, 1985). The reader who has followed the correspondence (published by us but not by you) may well ask what political debate has brought RPP to such a conclusion about a tendency whose literature and leaflets you initially welcomed as "worth reading and full of material to discuss and understand" (RPP to IBRP 11.12.84). The fact is, of course, that there has been no direct political dialogue between us until this latest, belated response of yours. We suggest that the nature of this response is related more to the fact that our arguments helped to reveal RPP's own political confusions to some of your own members than to a genuine attempt at debating the political issues at stake. Nevertheless your letter is useful for highlighting some of these issues.

In the first place, you make no bones about the fact that for RPP neither historical circumstance nor communist strategy and tactics have changed since 1848. The International Bureau is repeatedly charged with "perverting" "Marxism-Leninism" "on the pretext of alleged historical change in today's condition" (p.2, also p.3, p.4, p.5, etc.). You glibly depict us as neo-Anarchists and equate our positions with those of Bakunin at the same time as arguing, "We think that your views are identical with the views of the 'Left Communists' whom Comrade Lenin criticised specially in his booklet Left-Wing Communism - an Infantile Disorder" (p.1). This amalgam is typical of the sloppy method of RPP, but let's continue with the nub of your argument which is that revolutionaries today need look no further than Left-Wing Communism for their strategy and tactics since,

"The principles and programmes propounded by Comrade Lenin in the said booklet were based on the historical experiences gained during the period of 1848 to 1917 and further confirmed by the scientific analysis of Marx, Engels and Lenin about the class relationship between the different classes and sections of society from the standpoint of class analysis. The tactics and strategy enunciated therein would remain valid till capitalist society and class-ridden society are overthrown and destroyed."

Without seeing the irony you go on to quote from our letter as if the following were a damning indictment of the IBRP:



"You stated in you letter 'revolutionaries today cannot just take everything Lenin said (in this case Left-Wing Communism) and apply it like a religious dogma to changed historical circumstances.'

You [i.e. IBRP] also cryptically quoted from Lenin's writing of 1915 as under,

'one cannot be a revolutionary Social Democrat without participating according to one's power in developing this theory (Marxism) and adapting it to changed conditions'."(from page 2 of your letter to us.)

Again, we are condemned for "refusing to accept the Leninist line as correct and applicable today on the pretext of alleged historical change ..." and challenged to "openly declare that even for the period referred to in the booklet of Left-Wing Communism the tactics and strategy enunciated by Lenin were correct" (p.3).

Nothing could illustrate better your own unMarxist method. Instead of looking at Lenin's writings in the context of when they were written and the problem he was dealing with and quoting according to their appropriateness to today's conditions RPP treats everything as part of a simple, straightforward "Leninist line" which holds true for all time (or at least until the end of class society). Your approach is more reminiscent of the religious devotee trying to prove the orthodoxy of his beliefs by citing the holy scriptures than of historical materialists seeking to learn from Lenin's use of Marxist method.

In fact, so determined are you to 'prove' that capitalism's imperialist epoch changes nothing for communist strategy and tactics by reference to Lenin that you astonishingly refer us to Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism and remind us that:

"Comrade Lenin vividly explained in 1916 the 'imperialistic', 'parasitical and 'decadent' stage of capitalism",

adding,

"Your claim and assertion to treat the present-day decaying capitalism as something new or to treat it differently would be accepted by a person who has no knowledge of ABC of Marxism."(p.7)

It is difficult to believe that you cannot recognise that Lenin's booklet only supports our case. More than this, it is precisely on the analyses of revolutionary Marxists after the outbreak of World War One that our analysis of present-day capitalism is based - viz, that the First World War definitively opened up a new stage in capitalism's history. This new epoch - of wars and revolutions - spelt the end of capitalism's progressive, 'peaceful' development and called for a new strategy and tactics by revolutionary organisations. We are not arguing that capitalism's decadence is "new": it dates from the First World War and was recognised as such by that tiny minority of revolutionaries who, with Lenin at their head, were fighting to keep revolutionary Marxism alive in the face of the capitulation of Social Democracy to the bourgeoisie. This is the context of Lenin's Imperialism and it is a complete distortion to imply that the tactics of Left-Wing Communism either correspond with or follow on from the analysis outlined in the earlier pamphlet.

May we take the trouble to further remind you of the historical and political circumstances of both texts.

Following on Bukharin, Lenin in 1916 realised the need to explain the material basis for the world war and also to draw the political implications of this. For example, the fact that the war was an imperialist war where none of the belligerents could be classed as historically progressive; the impossibility of peaceful development for capital in the imperialist epoch (c.f. Kautsky). Of course these were not academic issues, they were part of the theoretical battle of revolutionary marxism against the social chauvinists who still pretended to act in the interests of the working class and often justified their support for their own national capital in the name of marxism (Potresov, etc.). Throughout 1915/16 Lenin was at pains to point out not only that the 1st World War had opened up the third and final epoch for capitalism, but that with this change in historical circumstance the objective tasks of that epoch were also different. In *Under a Stolen Flag* [February 1915] for instance, he traces the course of capitalism's development from its first, ascendant period (roughly the period of the Great French Revolution to the Paris Commune) when the historic task of the hour was "the breakdown of the obsolete feudal absolutist institutions", through its second epoch of "transition from the progressive character of the bourgeoisie to reactionary, even rabidly reactionary finance capital" (1871-1914), to "The third epoch, which is just beginning ... the epoch of imperialism and imperialist convulsions resulting from the nature of imperialism." (From Volume 18, pl26-7, Martin Lawrence edition). While the first period was characterised by bourgeois democratic and national movements, the second by the gathering of "the forces of a new class of modern democracy", the third places international tasks on the proletariat and has transformed the bourgeoisie "from a rising, progressive class (into) ... a sinking, decaying, eternally dead, reactionary class." (p.129, *ibid*).

And Lenin, as a good practitioner of Marx's method, recognised that revolutionary tactics could not be defined without first recognising and defining the main characteristics of the historical period in which they were to be applied:

"Only on this basis, i.e. by taking into account, in the first place, the fundamental distinguishing features of the various "epochs" (and not individual episodes in the history of individual countries) can we correctly determine our tactics; and only the knowledge of the fundamental features of a given epoch can serve as a basis for understanding in greater detail the peculiarities of one or the other country." (p.125, *ibid*)

Clearly, if we adopt the same method, we can see not only that Lenin's (and Marx's) writings and political activity span two different historical epochs but that it is mistaken to suppose that revolutionary strategy and tactics have remained essentially unchanged from 1848 to the present day.

"But", we can hear you exclaim, "Left-Wing Communism was written in 1920 - during the present imperialist epoch therefore the tactics outlined there must be correct for today and revolutionaries must accept them."

Unfortunately it is not so simple as this. Let's examine the issue

more closely, in its historical context.

The prime political task following the outbreak of war in 1914 was to consolidate the weak and scattered revolutionary forces, to develop the basis for a break with Social Democracy and for the formation of a new International. This task was above all carried out by Lenin and symbolised by the Zimmerwald Left with its fight to establish "turn the imperialist war into a civil war" as the watchword of the proletariat. (In many ways today's revolutionaries are in a similar, though even weaker position: we have to define the basis for a new international party which represents a distinct break not just with Social Democracy but also with Stalinism, Trotskyism and the so-called Marxist-Leninists of the counter-revolution. While RPP is quick to use Lenin of 1920 in order to dissociate itself from today's Communist Left we remember that in 1916 revolutionary Marxism was represented by the Zimmerwald Left).

In this period Lenin was adamant and explicit about the need for a total, permanent break with the old parties.

"The crisis that was created by the great war has torn off the conventions, has opened the abcess that had long ago become ripe, and has shown opportunism in its true role as an ally of the bourgeoisie. A complete separation of the workers' parties from this element, a definite organisational break, has become a necessity. The imperialist epoch cannot tolerate the existence in one party of an advance guard of the revolutionary proletariat on the one hand, and of the semi petty-bourgeois aristocracy of the working class which enjoys crumbs from the privileges of the 'great nation' situation on the other. The old theory of opportunism as a "legitimate shade" of one-and-the-same party that avoids "extremes" has now turned into the greatest betrayal of the workers and the greatest hindrance to the labour movement." (Collapse of the 2nd International p.319, *ibid*)

In marked contrast, Lenin in 1920 could write in *Left-Wing Communism*:

"That the Hendersons, the Clynes, the MacDonalds and the Snowdens are hopelessly reactionary is true ... But it by no means follows that to support them is treachery to the revolution, but rather that in the interests of the revolution the working class revolutionaries should give these gentlemen a certain amount of parliamentary support..." (p.81 Pekin edition).

It is in arguing for this that Lenin uses his famous analogy of support for the Labour Party "in the same way as the rope supports the hanged man ..." In *Left-Wing Communism* Lenin is not sure about whether a Communist Party in Britain (which had yet to be formed) should affiliate to the Labour Party. By the 2nd Congress of the International he had made his mind up - yes, it should and this message was duly passed on by Gallacher, much to the confusion of revolutionary elements involved in discussions towards communist unity in Britain.

For bourgeois commentators this is just another example of Lenin's political 'cunning' and scheming, but for those who regard his writings as a source of eternally valid truths it surely poses a graver problem. Yet what are genuine Marxists to make of this changed position? Surely

the answer must be to look at the change in the international political situation (though still within the same broad historical epoch). Left-Wing Communism cannot be understood without situating it in the context of the desperate isolation of the Russian Revolution which, after more than two years of civil war, required the support of a European Revolution which we now know was not to occur. Counter-revolution was approaching. If Lenin in 1920 couldn't have seen this clearly or predicted its full extent, he recognised the danger to the prospects of the European Revolution by the growing separation between revolutionary organisations and the mass of the working class. Already he was drawing up tactics for a period of (temporary) retreat based on a strategy of Communist Parties maintaining and increasing their links with the mass of the working class. The German Left (Lenin's main target in LWC) were drawing very different conclusions from the growing gulf between revolutionaries and their class - not just in evidence in Western Europe but in revolutionary Russia itself. While the German Left's theories about the need for a 'pure' revolutionary party which doesn't try to impose its will over the masses were to provide the basis for councilism as the counter-revolution developed we must also recognise that the strategy of maintaining links with the masses became the basis for the Comintern's opportunist policy of the united front as the counter-revolution tightened its hold.

It's true that one of the organisations of the IBRP (the CWO) began its political existence by identifying with the German Left. But you are mistaken to suppose that today there are elements inside the IBRP who do so. This is not the place to elaborate on the CWO's evolution but the long process of debate, study and clarification is well documented in the CWO's press (see *Revolutionary Perspectives* # 18-21 in particular). At the centre of this debate was the question of defining the tasks of a revolutionary party and the need to employ a consistent Marxist method. Today the CWO is at one with the other elements of the IBRP in recognising that without a strategy of linking the revolutionary organisation to the masses the communist party will never be in a position to lead those masses. And this is precisely the strategy behind Lenin's arguments in LWC. It was undoubtedly correct at the time and remains valid for us today.

But the problem doesn't end here. There remains the question of which tactics to employ and the problem of the objective limitations imposed by historical circumstance. And here the insight of the Italian Left is more appropriate than Left-Wing Communism. In 1922 the Italian Left, who still had the support of the majority of the Italian Communist Party's membership was conducting a battle against the Comintern's attempt to win over the masses by united fronts with other "workers' parties". They insisted in the Rome Theses that what had to be recognised is that in a period of retreat:

"It is an error to suppose that one can be expedients and manoeuvres expand the party base amongst the masses at any time since relations between the party and the masses depend in great part on the objective condition of the situation ..."

Are you seriously proposing that the CWO in Britain would gain the support of the mass of British workers if it slavishly followed Lenin and affiliated to the Labour Party or even 'critically' supported it at elections? We don't think so. The fact is we have to look more

deeply than this. Today the question of how to link up with the masses has to be seen in terms of both the overall historical epoch and the counter-revolutionary period within that epoch. We have to remember that we are not living in the 1871-1914 period of building new democratic parties but in a post-revolutionary period of defeat situated in the era of imperialism. Lenin, reluctant to admit that such a period was approaching while there was still hope for international revolution, saw only a period of temporary retreat. The tactics he advocated were essentially those of a previous epoch: use of parliament as a tribune, work in the trade unions to oust reactionary leaders.

We must take these issues separately because they present different problems.

## 1. Parliament and Revolutionary Parliamentarism

The question of how far parliament could be a useful forum for communist propaganda today can only be answered after answering the question "How is it possible for revolutionaries to utilise parliament today when the objective conditions for broad-based democratic parties no longer exist for the working class?" This is what we mean when we talk of revolutionaries facing enormous difficulties in using parliament as a tribune. The fact is that the objective situation does not permit such tactics in the 'normal' day-to-day life of capital and hence for the daily class struggle.

You state that you are surprised that the IBRP has "interpreted our 1981 these that we are of the view that parliament can be destroyed from within..."(p.26), claiming this to be a misrepresentation by us. In fact we were directly quoting your letter of 15.4.85 which is printed on pp35-36 of Communist Review #3 and where you talk of "smashing this bourgeois organisation from within". However you have deliberately misrepresented our argument by quoting only one sentence (about practical difficulties) and omitting the wider political context. We repeat, the issue is not simply one of practical difficulties, nor is it a matter of being abstentionist on principle (by the way Bordiga withdrew his abstentionist theses after their rejection at the 2nd Congress) but of facing up to changed historical circumstances and defining tactics accordingly.

## 2. Trade Union Work

Unlike parliament, the trade unions still hold the allegiance of a large part of the working class for whom they are believed to be 'workers' organisations'. As you know, our tactic is not to take over the leadership of the unions nor to form new, red trade unions, but to convert the defensive struggle into an offensive one. This means using union meetings, mass assemblies, etc. to maintain contact with the mass of the class where they are organised in the unions. Our aim is to raise the level of struggle politically and organisationally by calling for the struggle to be conducted for wider political aims and through democratically elected strike committees with recallable delegates, etc. With such organs of proletarian democracy the potential for class-wide organs develops and the potential for going beyond the unions to a real offensive against capital. Our policy of forming political groups of communists and sympathisers inside the workplace is part of the strategy to develop the party's links with the class. We don't claim

them as incipient factory committees (which will be composed of the workforce as a whole).

It is really not very useful to point to Russian trade unions' support for the Revolution before and after October - unions which in the main only came into existence after the February Revolution but which, unlike the factory committees and soviets, survived to become part of the state capitalist apparatus. Nor is it 'proof' that trade unions can become revolutionary to cite European trade unions' support for 'revolutionary' Russia. For many European trade unions ritual support for Russia was part of their means of maintaining a hold on the class struggle in order to sabotage it at home. This became more and more true during the Twenties when, for example, in Britain Communist Party trade union leaders led the 'Hands Off Russia' campaign at the same time as sabotaging the strike movements in Britain in 1921 and 1926.

In fact it is futile to discuss tactics, whether about parliamentarism, work in the trade unions or anything else, until RPP is prepared to confront the question of Marxist method and analyse the whole problem of the counter-revolution more coherently. The question of the tasks of the communist party cannot be reduced to one of blanket agreement or disagreement with Left-Wing Communism. The lessons of the whole experience of the defeat of the revolution and the period we are in have to be understood. And since you have chosen to criticise the Communist Left you would do better to get your facts straight. The Italian Left, for example, far from never having been in the Comintern, conducted a principled fight against its degeneration and in so doing kept alive the Marxist tradition against the increasingly counter-revolutionary policies imposed by the Russian party. Not for the first time the forces of revolutionary Marxism were reduced to that of a fraction. Before we can overcome our present isolation from the masses we have to build up a clear political kernel which incorporates the lessons from that experience at a deeper level than blaming everything on bad leadership. This demands facing up to the fact that for Marxists there are no absolute truths, no eternally valid programme and, in the case of RPP, no infallibly correct Lenin.

It is up to you whether you are prepared to take this debate seriously and open it up to your membership. You can't go on for ever evading responsibility for your own incoherence by placing the blame for 'errors' on the editor of your paper. The paper is the responsibility of the whole organisation, not just of a single individual. Similarly, if you should begin to take the question of political clarification seriously you will cease trying to put yourselves out of the firing line of Marxist criticism by such absurd demands that the IBRP must "criticise the arguments advanced by the ICC". Absurd, because in the absence of an original critique of your own, the only thing you have seen fit to publish of the IBRP is one of the many articles of ours criticising the ICC. Given your lack of shared perspectives with us this can only be seen as a piece of opportunism on your part.

In short, it is up to you whether you want to be part of the dynamic toward the formation of an international communist nucleus which takes into account the experience of the last sixty years or more; or whether you wish to remain the prisoners of outmoded tactics and slogans like your newly-found allies of the CPIran.

Communist greetings, IBRP



# Where Has Lal Pataka Come From and Where is it Going ?

Lal Pataka has torn itself away from all its relations with the left of capital. In the course of its struggle for existence during the last three years through experience, study and theoretical analysis it has moved forward to reach the decision that it is only the 'Left Communist' tendency which truly inherits the enormous experience and theoretical treasure of the proletarian class consciousness of the communist movement. And it is this that leads Lal Pataka in its historical trajectory to draw political raw materials from the mine of left communism.

In the course of our protracted and bitter ideological struggle we broke with a party, CPI(M) that belongs to the prevailing Stalinist state capitalist-leftist current, and consequently we cut ourselves off organisationally from the Left Front,[1] and published the events, facts and correspondence relating to the breaking phase in a booklet named Everything Must Be Called By Its Proper Name. Therefore we had made a step forward to a transitional perspective in an atmosphere of continuous political seclusion, uncertainty, apprehension, sacrifice and sufferance. In our endeavour to search out the revolutionary elements and establish links with them we were inspired by the self-sacrifices of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg of the German Internationalist Group. Our Lal Pataka came out on the 15th January, 1983 by drawing the heritage of its name from Die Rote Fahne the organ of their tendency. On the same date 64 years ago Liebknecht and Luxemburg had become victims in the hand of the butchers who called themselves socialists.

Many militant leaders have been murdered by the Stalinists and Maoists in the same way in this country; the editor of Lal Pataka has also been attacked time and again; that's why that date.

Lal Pataka came into existence soiled with capitalist Leftism within the orbit of experiences drawn from the experiments and results of leftist politics. By the last half of that year it became related to the Bengali monthly Sarbaharar Mukti published in Calcutta. At the outset they wanted to know our opinion about Stalinism, Trotskyism and Maoism and about the present state structure of Russia, China and India. What we wrote in reply was later published in the text, "The Extirpation of the Third International". This was followed by a few meetings. While exchanging our views it was decided that the texts written on the basis of unanimity would be published without the name of the author, but the articles rousing divergent opinions would be published in the name of the author himself. That meant no viewpoint would be suppressed - corroborating the Marxist policy: "The communists disdain to conceal their views and aims." (Manifesto of the Communist Party p.94). Criticism, self-criticism, the struggle between opinions and principles would be allowed to continue openly. Wrong views would be refuted politically and the scientific ones would be established. On the basis of this principle Lal Pataka and Sarbaharar Mukti came into a conjuncture just a few days before the first conference at Gorakshpur in August, 1984 with a view to building

up "Revolutionary Proletarian Platform".

Although an eclectic grouping in political transition, there was at least one potential tendency in the perspective of the Platform. Its draft theses clearly stated that the platform, "... may be suitably changed and improved through discussions and analysis of the objective material conditions prevailing in India and the world at large ..." (p.2) That this declaration was absolutely fraudulent has been exposed through the continuous conflicts on the same question in the Central Committee. They settled that 'new' views could not be directly carried even to the 'lower rank cadres', not to speak of the class, for two reasons; firstly "cadres are immature, so they won't be able to assimilate the same and they will be confused". (In other words, they are to remain imprisoned within the confines of the current ideologies of the platform!!); and secondly, due to the maintenance of formal organisational discipline - once an opinion is accepted in a conference, it is the solemn responsibility of the party members to propagandise the same, to chase out other opinions without giving any hearing to them, without understanding them until the next conference. Of course, if anybody insists, it is said that he has the 'right' to submit the new opinion to the 'leaders'. What a caricature of the word 'right'! What a rape of the dialectical process! For these people, ideology and its consequent organisation is only a petrified fossil, but not the changing framework of and not the vanguard association corresponding to the expression of the existence of a class in a living and class-ridden society - relating to changes in the ever-eventful, dialectical and complex situation. They do not recognise that the members of the Platform live, apart from the platform, in a greater class-society and even if the leaders try to conceal an opinion, there are a thousand and one other links through which it becomes exposed. Thus, the more laws, the more flaws!

The strongest blow that had fallen on the existence of Lal Pataka had been struck in 1985. The publication of the journal had to be suspended in July 1985 due to the disruptive activities of the member entrusted with the responsibility of the press - in connivance with a section of the Editorial Board. For example, keeping away the editorial without the knowledge of the writer and editor, whimsically keeping aside specific articles passed by the Board for publication and instead replacing them

by trumped-up stories and reports; shattering the printing plan by splitting up the most vital and compact writings into pieces and scattering them on different pages and even different issues of the journal; and above all, stealing the files and attache case of the editor containing the draft theses and other articles written by the editor, thus killing the possibility of publishing them and on the basis of the same texts, preparation and publication of counter-articles, etc. They resorted to such meanness because they were politically defeated in the ideological struggle within the Platform. That is why the Platform reached its obvious destination - the splits. In this connection, we refer to our 'Open Letter' and 'Special Appeal'. From now on Lal Pataka will be published as the Bengali quarterly organ of the political tendency of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party. The main contribution to this tendency has been by the left communist current of Italy, particularly by the Partito Comunista Internazionale.

It is very clear that the majority faction of the Central Committee of the RPP has only exploited their domination by numbers. They have become afraid of facing up to the political and organisational implications of breaking with counter-revolution. They have tried to avoid and deny the 'Left Communist' current; failed to pay attention to the positions and propositions which are gradually becoming translucent through the luminous orbit of the historical heritage of revolutionary marxism. Instead of attaining clarity through debate, contradiction and cooperation while facing each others' viewpoints and rejecting a sectarian outlook in the course of ~~the~~ resurging political current of the proletariat within the milieu of class consciousness which has been enriched, enthused and advanced by the 'Communist Left', and resultantly accepting the most advanced, most developed and scientific reasoning, they have dipped into the mire of bourgeois ideology by shutting up all the doors of reflection, thinking and organising. Along with this they display their bourgeois chastity by volleying out aloud abuses against the Left Communists and that too at a time when, once again, humanity is standing face to face against another World War and barbarism, and when out of stormy waves of class struggle, in the provinces and the outskirts of the globe, ever-new militants and groups of revolutionaries are emerging all the time and devoting themselves to building

up the revolutionary political positions of the proletariat and creating the framework for the political autonomy of the world proletariat.

Therefore, the remaining framework of that Platform is useless for the struggle for finding out the origins of the ideological questions of this epoch and their solutions. Now it only helps to increase the number of hundreds of capitalist leftist parties and fractions by one more.

Lal Pataka has left behind its pre-history - breaking out of the ideological prison of capitalist leftism and counter-revolution, it has started to inhale freely in the fresh light and air of proletarian class consciousness. This emancipation has been feasible for it only because, from the very beginning, Lal Pataka has always upheld the necessity of a worldwide party and world-embracing revolution for the establishment of proletarian internationalism and the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e. proletarian revolution. It is this most vital and fundamental position that has forced Lal Pataka to wash out its capitalist leftist stain. The events of the present epoch have proved that the international working class can depend on neither any of the existing political organisations nor on the trade unions to defend its class interests.

Within only three years of its life, Lal Pataka has had to pass through adolescence by endeavouring to search out the origin of and solution to the ideological questions, and by leaving behind its reformist past in order to reach the communist positions corresponding to decadent capitalism. The assimilation of revolutionary viewpoints within its perspective has come about only by tearing the snare of illusion of leftism of various shades and colours, one after another, and foregoing the enticement of cheap popularity. This process has not been very easy and straightforward; we had to step one by one while marching through a course that was complex, painful, zigzag, up-down and leading to advances and retreats based on the marxist positions corresponding to the progressive phase of capitalism. We have reached the stage of our cohesion with the International Bureau through the great concord of living experience, hard-earned, while breaking and building various countless positions and organisations in the process of rejection and acceptance of thousands of political projects and hypotheses

under the domination of the officially accepted so-called communist (Stalinist, Trotskyist, and Maoist - in a word, state capitalist) current as against the new viewpoints emerging out of the transitional phase of proletarian class consciousness.

At each stage of the advance, by analysing the present reactionary, i.e. imperialist and decadent character of capitalism - and corresponding to the development of communist consciousness, by overcoming the prejudices of all conventional bigotry, proclaimed formulae, legal confines, eternal purity and bourgeois morality, Lal Pataka has reached its present position. It had to proceed, and is proceeding, by trekking over the mountains of impediments at every moment day in and day out. In the twilight of the transition of the current age with a view to showing the path ahead for our class, years of hard work, complex struggles, and across the oceans of deprivation, we have searched out the way. Diligence is the mother of good luck. And pain is forgotten where gain follows. While one question after another haunted us for about two decades, when, in spite of our sincere efforts to analyse the 'class consciousness' of the 'class for itself' stemming from the class identity of the 'class-in-itself' i.e. the sparks of communist consciousness, we tried to keep to the marxist ideological domain of yester epoch - the tenets and positions structured during the ascendancy of capitalism had to be upheld. At last the contact with the political tendency of the International Bureau has prised off the lid from our consciousness, allowing us to explain the perspective of the epoch of reaction of capitalism and has inspired us to adopt the positions relevant to the age. This is the dynamic course of Lal Pataka which moved into confluence with the course of the IBRP and adopted its new turn.

So far as the decadent character of capitalism, through its dialectical-historical analysis, becomes clarified, thus far it also becomes clear that the positions and institutions which were useful for the defence and development of the interests of the working class during the growth phase of capitalism have become instruments in the hands of capitalism on its death bed - i.e. state capitalism. Exactly because of that, new problems of the new age are seeking their solution - at the same time as a consequence of the dialectical law of motion of the social system itself, new positions

and institutions are also in the process of their emergence. At this moment it is our responsibility to find the missing links of proletarian class consciousness and its historic container and constructor - the revolutionary party - and to spin thousands of linking threads throughout the world towards a party of the world proletariat. The communist vanguard will have to establish all-pervading, incessant and intimate relationships with its own class and through them with its class allies - other toilers, and build the class organisation for advancement by regularly reproducing and renewing that network of relations. The correct marxist tendency will have to be implanted and configured with the expanse of the behavioural life of the proletariat and its class consciousness as well.

The most urgent task, at this absolutely critical time of the world-wide crisis of capitalism, is to build up the revolutionary party. This is necessary to understand that the phase of imperialism and decadence is that period of capitalism when the objective pre-conditions for communism are ripe, yet the revolution has not come about since subjective consciousness could not be roused, because the revolutionary party could not be built up. We recognise that for the success of the proletarian revolution both the objective pre-conditions and subjective consciousness must be ripened. The Russian revolution was defeated due to the lack of consciousness of the world proletariat. So, until the victory of socialism and during the transition, the importance of unceasing class struggle under the dominance of the dictatorship of the proletariat must be realised. That, without this, under any circumstance, any temporary pause in this struggle also implies obliteration of the power of the proletariat and resumption of the same by the bourgeoisie must also be understood from the defeat of the October Revolution and the fact of its degeneration into state capitalism.

That is why the immediate task of the vanguard is to organise the nuclei everywhere as the embryo of the party. Not to remain confined in the quarrels for sharing personal and sectional opportunities and the vicious circle of patchworks but to build up revolutionary unity within the course of the class struggle is the process to which the each class-conscious worker must lend his hands. As regards the unity of the working class, Karl Marx wrote:

"Large scale industry concentrates in one place a crowd of people unknown to one another. Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss, unites them in a common thought of resistance - combination ... combinations at first isolated, constitute themselves into groups ... and in face of always united capital the maintenance of the association becomes more necessary to them than that of wages ... In this struggle - a veritable civil war - all the elements necessary for a coming battle unite and develop. Once it has reached this point, association takes on a political character." [The Poverty of Philosophy Coll. Wks. Vol. 6 pp. 210-211, Progress publishers, Moscow]

With that objective ahead, Lal Pataka entreats revolutionaries in India to build up a nucleus on the basis of the principles written below, by rejecting capitalist leftism as well as the neo-spontaneist and councilist spectrum.

- 1) Destruction of capitalism of all sorts, privately owned, state owned and self-managed, through revolutionary upsurges. Establishment of a classless society, where production will be organised for the direct satisfaction of the requirements of human society and the principle of distribution will be - each according to his necessity and choice, by eliminating the money-system, commodity production and the market and wages system, everybody's life will be full of affluence, dearthless joys, inspired by creative adventures.
- 2) Recognition of the revolution of October 1917 in Russia as proletarian. Analysis of the process of the establishment of state capitalism in Russia, in the light of which configuration of the present framework of the communist programme.
- 3) Recognition of the break made with social democracy in the first two Congresses of the Third International.
- 4) Rejection of all left capitalist, so-called communist, socialist and labour parties and organisations as bourgeois parties and organisations and abandoning the road of forming any form of united front with them.
- 5) In this epoch it is exclusively the working class (the sellers of labour power - mental and physical - in the process of producing surplus value directly or indirectly; the

unemployed; the women who produce and reproduce labour power at home, etc.) that is revolutionary. It is also only the working class which can emancipate human society from the clutch of privation, crisis and war. Therefore, adoption of a clear orientation towards a party of the revolutionary workers which bases itself on the doctrine and method of Marxism which is recognised as the science of the proletariat.

6) Opposition to any policy of maintaining the divisions of the working class based on sex, religion, caste, creed, colour, nationality and even occupation or grade.

7) National independence and the attempts for autonomous indigenous capitalist development are absurd with the present world capitalist imperialist framework; therefore, opposition to all sorts of nationalism, rejection of all possibility of subordinating the proletariat to the national bourgeoisie.

8) Trade unionism is the inseparable organ of capitalism. The existence of trade unions is organically interwoven with the existence of the wages system. During the development of capitalism (nineteenth century) they had the task of winning better terms for selling labour power, of winning reforms. But in the epoch of the decadence of capitalism (twentieth century) reform is impossible. In order to resist the continuous fall in the real rate of profit throughout the world, what is required for the successive extended reproduction, concentration and centralisation of capital and for the essential improving of its organic composition is the rise in the absolute and relative rates of surplus value, i.e. the rise in the rate

of exploitation, i.e. a fall in real wages (results - unemployment, inflation). Thus, far from life being improved through the wages system, its very survival is at stake. Yet trade unionism only preserves the wages system, keeps the working class mystified, retains the class struggle within the domain of bourgeois discipline and derails the same. That is why the working class will have to join hands in the struggle for the abolition of the wages system only by recuperating itself from the swamp of trade unionism.

9) Parliament is simply an organ of the capitalist state. According to the political line of the working class parliament is an institution antithetical to socialism. Since it is impossible to reform capitalism in its epoch of decadence, participation in parliamentary elections also keeps the working class mystified. Thus, not the participation in elections, but the formation of soviets by recallable delegates is the real need of the working class.

10) Opposition to sectarianism; maintenance of principled cooperation between revolutionaries; and at the same time recognition of the organising role of the party in the daily struggle of the working class just as in the revolution itself.

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[1] The Left Front Government in West Bengal where Stalinist and Maoist parties participate in the local capitalist administration in the name of 'communism'.



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\* # 1 Contains:

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Critique of Revolutionary Proletarian Platform

# Draft Theses on Communist Tasks in Capitalism's Periphery : Addenda

For technical reasons the English version of these Theses printed in Communist Review 3 had part of Theses 12 and 13 missing. The following extract is a correction to that. Assiduous readers will already have noted that CR3 contained two Thesis 12s. The following passage should be inserted at the end of the first of these. Parts a) and b) of the second Thesis 12 (on page 24) now become parts b) and c) of Thesis 13. We apologise to readers for these mistakes but hope that more correspondence on this draft will allow us to publish a more developed version at a not too distant date.

On the basis of this agitation the internationalist communists must organise inside the masses by putting themselves at the head of all protest movements and all struggles against the oppression existing in society in order to lead them to revolutionary maturity in strict coordination with other national sections of the working class and their international revolutionary expressions and leadership.

13. When confronted by any of the remaining nationalist movements communists make a distinction between the nationalist expression of the movement and its deeper root causes in the severe oppression and deep poverty which foreign occupation or direct domination brings to the masses.

Using this distinction communists can denounce the bourgeois character of nationalism and its incapacity to resolve the problems of poverty and superexploitation facing the masses of proletarians and dispossessed of the area. In support of this denunciation internationalist communists must act within the concrete struggle of the masses against oppression and superexploitation in strict accordance with the demands of the working class. The work of agitation and propaganda around these questions will lead to the deepening of the class character of the movement and thus to a deeper unity with the struggles of the workers in the oppressor countries against bourgeois attempts to whip up nationalism. Thus the antagonism between whole peoples will be transformed into the struggles between classes.

Nationalistic mass movements aren't the product of the existence of bourgeois forces (like the PLO and a capitalist like Arafat) in themselves but are due to the existence of struggles of the oppressed, superexploited and disinherited which bourgeois propaganda can work

on in order to seize the leadership of these movements.

Bourgeois nationalist forces maintain in their programmes that the only solution to the dramatic problems of the masses is the acquisition of their own national identity and territorial base within which would be guaranteed equality of rights, freedom of movement and bourgeois democratic freedoms in general. According to them this would be enough to secure the development and thus the wellbeing of everyone.

They thus tie all the political and social elements which would like to struggle against imperialism behind their own political chariot by stepping up the war of words against imperialism in order to create the illusion that national liberation, or rather, following nationalist objectives somehow weakens imperialism.

Such mystifications are based on the ideological and counter-revolutionary theory that only the USA is imperialist. This justifies alliances with the other imperialist formation, the USSR and its "socialist" camp. This is the ideological cover which allows the political leaderships of these social movements to enter into the global dynamic of interimperialist conflicts as mere pawns.

The national solution in no way can solve the problems which motivate the mass movements in those countries:

a) the creation of a bourgeois national state merely reproduces the same old problems. The double exploitation which created the mass struggles continues, no longer in the clear shape of economic domination and exploitation by occupying forces, or of direct political domination and exploitation by capitalists or their agents - rather the unified form of exploitation of the worker and peasant masses by capital is now in national clothes, though it continues to obey the laws of the international division of labour and of the international markets of finance capital.



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