

WORKERS VOICE

second series

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'The Labour Movement': Still the Bosses' Best Friend

In this issue of Workers Voice, we look at the rotting corpse of the Labour Movement and show how workers' present disillusionment with it can be turned into revolutionary class anger against this system.

To begin with, let's contrast the real fight of unemployed workers against the state with the Labour/TUC "Peoples March for Jobs".

Even in leftist terms, this march was a pathetic crawl of carefully-selected lackeys of the TUC. Whilst supporting it, even Labour's loyal "leftenants", the WRP and the SWP were forced to object to the fact that marchers were prevented by the trade union NCO's from shouting anti-Tory slogans - so as not to damage Labour's election chances! More importantly, the anti-working class role of trade union-organised begging bowl marches was illustrated by its declared aim "to unite the bishop and the brickie" (i.e. the ruling class and the working class), and by the fact that striking workers from Greenings engineering in Warrington were not allowed to collect money on the route.

The TUC thus made it perfectly clear that the aim of the march was to help sabotage workers' struggles, as well as spread the illusion that there is a way of peacefully fighting unemployment. More so than at previous jobs jamborees, many of the 100,000 workers who turned up to welcome the march at Hyde Park on 5th June booed the trade union leaders on the platform. And in spite of attempts by Communist Party stewards to physically prevent anti-Labour speakers from intervening in the crowd, many walked off in disgust when Labour politicians spoke. There was no enthusiasm among the workers there for their present so-called left-wing "leaders" in the so-called "Labour Movement". Since Foot's resignation we have been treated to another round of fake calls for "socialism". The

Labour leadership struggle between Kinnock and Hattersley is presented to us as the beginning of a Labour revival. Most of this will be of more interest to Fleet Street and leave workers cold. But disillusionment with the Labour Movement is not enough. Workers must turn their present negativity into a commitment to an all-out fight against the accelerating attack on jobs, wages and services which this government, like its left and right-wing counterparts the world over, is being forced to implement. Make no mistake - the economy is on the brink of a nosedive, and the coming wave of attacks on living standards will dwarf the previous one.

The commitment to fight is still being shown by sections of the unemployed. Recent riots in Toxteth and Tottenham have been blacked out by the media, in case other workers were "given ideas". And as the jobs marchers arrived in London, unemployed workers in Brixton fought the police and burned a police car. The contrast between these events could not have been more marked. Whilst the spontaneous energy of the Brixton workers may not have got very far on this occasion it keeps the class struggle very much alive. On the other hand, those peacefully frog-marched to Hyde Park under the firm control of the "Labour Movement" can only gladden the hearts of our class enemies. In the coming months fake union militancy will try to contain the class anger of the workers and prevent employed linking up and supporting unemployed. The mirage of a "really socialist" Labour Party will be held before our eyes in the election circus for a new leader. And all this will hide the real issue; that the "Labour Movement" is a movement against the real interests of the working class. Its destruction will remove a major obstacle to the emergence of a revolutionary class movement.

Chile: TIME UP FOR PINOCHET?

On the 11th May, tens of thousands of workers demonstrated against the military regime in Chile, and barricades appeared in the working-class suburbs of Santiago. Several workers were killed by the police and hundreds imprisoned. On the 14th and 15th of June, riots broke out in Santiago again. Police were forced to withdraw behind barricades of burning tyres. The riots then must have been widespread, given the fact that the Chilean police are not noted for their reluctance to open fire. As on 11th May, several teenage workers were shot dead, and workers protested by organising city-wide protests. When it became clear how widespread the protests were, they took to the streets with Molotov cocktails.

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²Against Capitalist Elections, For Workers' Democracy!

After a month in which election campaigns and the state of the polls have dominated TV news coverage and newspaper reports the "British people" once again exercised their democratic right to vote. Thatcher has strengthened the Cabinet in her own image, confident, she says, of the backing of the "country" for her policies. There can be no doubt that more of the same from the newly-elected Conservative government will do nothing to solve the economic crisis and it will be forced to step up its attack on working class living standards dramatically. Within days of the election result Building Societies were announcing an increase in the mortgage rate; inflation has gone up and factories have continued to close down and lay workers off (Crawfords in Liverpool; Birds Eye/Walls in London and Eastern England).

The significance of the general election is not that the Tories claim to have won a landslide victory (30.8% of the electorate whilst almost 30% of the electorate did not vote is hardly a landslide), nor that Labour has won less seats than at any time since 1935. The real significance of elections is their use by the ruling class to reinforce the strength and legitimacy of the capitalist state. A general election is the perfect opportunity for our rulers to peddle lies about democracy. The lie that the interests of the British nation are anything but the interests of a minority class of parasites. The lie that universal suffrage - a 5 yearly cross on a ballot paper - means that workers are equal with the capitalists. The lie that responsible political action is a question of individual choice about who will best represent your interests in parliament. In short, the lie that there is only one kind of democracy - parliamentary (or bourgeois) democracy.

The truth is that the British nation, like all nations, is divided into classes where the ruling capitalist class controls all the apparatus of the state (police, army, law courts etc.) and appropriates the surplus value produced by the working class. The interest of the ruling class is to defend British capitalism. They must try and increase business competitiveness and maintain the profitability of firms by increasing the amount of surplus value taken from the working class. This means more lay-offs, wage cuts, speed-ups and harsher working conditions. When these attacks on the working class have finally proved unable to prevent the decline of the world economy world capitalism will have no alternative but a Third World War. The interest of the working class however is to defend itself against the attacks of the ruling class; to fight against cuts in living standards, working conditions, wages and jobs. An effective defence can only be made by uniting nationally and eventually internationally to establish a world community where goods are produced directly for social needs, where exploitation has ended and consequently where there is no reason for imperialist war.

The truth is that workers can't defend their interests as individual citizens who put a cross on a ballot paper for one or other party at intermittent intervals. The truth is that the only way workers can defend themselves against the attacks is to unite and fight as one class outside of and against the institutions and organisations which defend the present system. In the 20th Century history has shown us that such a fight can create the basis for a higher form of democracy - working class (or proletarian) democracy based on workers' councils, or soviets.

In 19th century Europe the working class often supported the bourgeois democratic revolutions and in Britain politically advanced workers supported the radical wing of the Chartist movement in its demand for universal suffrage. As workers began to realise that they were just as exploited and politically powerless after these revolutions as before, they began to create their own political parties alongside their trade unions - the social democratic and Labour parties which helped workers to win reforms (like the shorter working day). The ruling capitalist class did not easily grant social reforms and higher wages to the working class - they were the result of hard and bitter struggles. However, despite capitalism's cyclical crises, its "recessions" and "depressions", lasting gains were possible and the trade unions and social democratic parties which developed out of the reformist struggle brought a real working class movement into existence.

The First World War spelt the end of an epoch of reformism and the end of capitalism as a progressive system. The millions of workers who sacrificed their lives on imperialism's battlefields did so in vain. There was to be no world fit for heroes -

only temporary economic boom followed by world crisis and a second imperialist world war involving unprecedented death and destruction. This infernal cycle continues today and is leading world capitalism inexorably towards a third world war. For over 70 years the capitalist system has been a barrier to human progress and the only force which is capable of destroying it and creating a higher system of production is the working class - the class which produces society's wealth.

THE FIRST EXPERIMENTS

Already in the Paris Commune of 1871 the class had shown its capacity of governing itself and the contrast between parliamentary and workers' democracy.

"Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to misrepresent the people" (Marx),

the Commune was based on delegatory not representative democracy. Instead of casting their vote and then leaving politics to the politicians, the Communards elected delegates who were responsible to the Commune and recallable by the majority of its members at any time. The police and standing army were abolished and replaced by a revolutionary militia which, like all other branches of administration, was responsible to the Commune and could be recalled by it. In 1905 and again in 1917 the Russian working class revived the essence of the Paris Commune when they created workers councils as an alternative to capitalist state power. Working class democracy - where delegates are elected by mass assemblies to carry out the

orders of the workers who have elected them and who can be recalled immediately they fail to do so - has shown itself not to be an idealistic utopia but a real basis for workers to overthrow the capitalist state and wield their own state power. Unlike a parliament, which can only pass laws, workers councils carry out and supervise all the functions of the state. The council delegates, unlike MPs, are there to act in the interests of one class - the working class organised in its factory committees and councils. As other classes are integrated into social production they join the councils and so take part in the running of the state. For working class democracy to be consolidated however, the class must destroy the power of the capitalist state. The workers councils, as the basis for the proletarian state are the means to do this. In future the revolutionary party will have to do what the Bolshevik Party did in 1917. It will have to put its programme forward within the councils to win over a majority of delegates to winning complete state power to the councils by destroying the old capitalist state machine.

THE SABOTEURS

When this happened in Russia in 1917 and the Bolsheviks led the revolutionary working class to overthrow the old state apparatus and to consolidate soviet power, the social democratic parties and trade unions throughout Europe did their best to prevent the same thing happening at home AT THE SAME TIME as pretending to support the Russian Revolution. When the First World War broke

LEAFLET

BOYCOTT THE ELECTIONS: PREPARE THE CLASS WAR

The election has been called at a time when world capitalism is suffering its most severe crisis since the Second World War. The world economy is heading for collapse. 1982 was capitalism's worst year since 1929. The crisis is caused by the capitalist system itself and can't be solved by any economic measures the bosses take. The only real choice which exists today is between communism and capitalist barbarism. The bosses final solution to the crisis will be war, just as it was in 1914 and 1939.

Election Fraud

The election is a fraud. Its real purpose is to trick workers into voting for one of the bosses parties so that the next government's attacks on the working class can appear to be carried out democratically "in the interests of all" etc. The truth is that our society is a class society in which the capitalist class exercises dictatorship over the working class. Elections just disguise the violence of their rule. Today the bosses have only one answer to the crisis - cuts in living standards by lay-offs, speed-ups and cuts in social services. Which-ever party is elected this will happen since all the parties stand for capitalism and will defend it to the death.

Labour Party: Bosses' Party

Some workers think Labour fights for the working class. This isn't true. The Labour Party is just as anti-working class as the other bosses parties. Labour's election programme is similar to that of the socialist government in France. But instead of a better life, the "socialist government" is forcing workers to make even greater sacrifices for the good of French capitalism than the previous right-wing government. Under the last Labour government unemployment rose from 600,000 to 1½ million, i.e. it tripled. One wage restraint policy followed another; social spending was slashed; hospitals and schools were closed; troops were used to break strikes, e.g. firemen's and Glasgow dustmen. The Labour Party is also just as prepared to go to war to defend British capitalism as the Tories. It supported World Wars 1 and 2; it supported the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima when it was in government in 1945; it developed Britain's own nuclear bomb; and all the present generation of nuclear weapons were acquired under Labour. Last year it supported the Falklands war. A future Labour government will repeat all these things because these are the things which British capitalism needs, and it is this which Labour supports against the workers.

Communism

There is an alternative to the misery, unemployment and war which capitalism inflicts on us. This is communism: a system of worldwide production for need organised by workers themselves through a network of workers councils. Communism has nothing to do with the state capitalist regimes in Russia and China whose workers are suffering the same attacks from the bosses as we are. To establish communism we must reject the elections of the bosses and build a class political party to give the lead in the struggle for communism. Today's crises and tomorrow's wars must be used to seize political power from the bosses and build a communist world. As a first step we must refuse to make any sacrifices the bosses demand for the national interest. Groups of international communists need to be built in the factories to take the lead in this struggle against wage cuts, lay-offs, speed-ups, etc.

War

A fight for workers' interests NOW is also the first step in the struggle against the imperialist war which the bosses are preparing for tomorrow. When the bosses go to war we must refuse to make sacrifices for the war effort. This will be the first step towards turning the imperialist war into a class war for communism.

WORKERS: ●No to the fraud of bosses' elections. Organise workplace meetings to support a boycott!

●Smash the Tory warmongers, smash the Labour warmongers!

●No to sacrifices for British capitalism. For the defence of our class!

●For the building of groups of international communists in the factories.

out the old workers movement was incapable of seeing that the working class no longer had anything to gain from the existing system. Instead of leading a revolutionary class struggle for the defeat of their "own" governments they chose to defend their individual national capitals and urged workers to sacrifice their lives, to accept the militarisation of labour and in general to abandon their own class interests for the sake of imperialism and the survival of capitalism. In the revolutionary turmoil that spread throughout Europe at the end of the First World War these parties worked with the trade unions inside the democratic organs of the working class to de-politicise them and undermine them by spreading the myth that it is unnecessary to destroy capitalist state institutions. All of this was the inevitable result of clinging to outmoded reformist politics. Those who still claimed that it was possible for the working class to make advances without destroying capitalism inevitably ended up reinforcing it.

TODAY'S REFORMISTS

Today the Labour Party and trade unions are still playing this role of undermining the class struggle and diverting it onto safe grounds for capitalism. And if Labour's working class image has worn a bit thin there are plenty of leftist groups who continue to promote the illusion that Labour is a "workers party" and in the existence of a "Labour Movement". For the Trotskyists Labour's programme may not be state capitalist enough but workers are still told to vote "with no illusions" (or similar) for the party which they persist in claiming is the lesser evil to Thatcher. Or if not, a dose of Labour will prove to the working class the need for more nationalisations!

For real revolutionaries, the task is to expose elections for what they are - a con-trick to strengthen credibility in the system and to encourage the belief that working class interests can be defended in Parliament (if only the right party gets in!).

In the aftermath of the election, as before, one of our major tasks is to expose the sabotage of the class struggle by the left wing of capital. It doesn't matter which party the ruling class has decided to adopt, the economic crisis won't go away. Its true that in 1983 our rulers, through their control of the media, favoured the Conservatives to Labour. This isn't because Labour poses any threat to the capitalist order but because in the immediate term Labour's policies are less acceptable to US imperialism. In the build-up to war the US does not want the thorn in its side or a British government quibbling about deployment of nuclear missiles and threatening to disrupt NATO and the EEC. But policies like this aren't the result of a working class standpoint. THE LABOUR PARTY IS IF ANYTHING MORE NATIONALIST THAN THE TORIES. The Labour Party stands for the defence of British capitalism by means of protectionism and tariff barriers and more "conventional" weapons to defend the property of the British bourgeoisie. In the coming period the danger is that workers in Britain will be conned by the Left into believing that the step-up in attacks which capital will be forced to implement is the fault of the Conservatives alone.

THE WAY FORWARD

The way forward for the class is not to dissipate its energies in a trade union/Labour Party orchestrated anti-Thatcher front, but to begin to fight independently

against all factions of the ruling class, left right and centre. 3

Both in power and out of it, the Labour Party and the trade unions showed their inherently anti-working class nature. The Labour Party imposed the 'social contract' and the unions enforced it: workers were told not to rock the capitalist boat, while those on the upper decks continued to throw hundreds of thousands of us overboard: unemployment tripled under Labour. When the Tories took over the parliamentary circus, Labour and the unions continued to sabotage the class struggle from below deck.

The steel union prevented the steel strike of 1980 from generalising to private steelworkers after giving the Steel Corporation 6 weeks notice to build up stocks. They kept the issue of pay the aim of the strike, and kept redundancies out of it. Having successfully sabotaged the strike, they then negotiated with the corporation how many tens of thousands of workers were to be laid off. Trusting the union led to disaster for the steelworkers.

In the last election millions of workers (many of them young unemployed - 50% of those aged 18-27 didn't vote) expressed their disgust with the system and ignored the ballot boxes. But abstensionism is not enough. Class action, not individual apathy is the only road forward. By taking the road of independent class action, by organising mass strikes, by forming factory committees, by linking up employed and unemployed, by uniting across trade union and industry boundaries and going on to form workers' councils the working class can again build its own democracy - revolutionary proletarian democracy - which is the basis for a world community of producers which will destroy all traces of the present system of exploitation and war.

Time up for Pinochet?

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At the same time the middle class have turned against the regime. Besides industrialists and farmers, the same lorry drivers whose strike came just before the overthrow of the self-styled "Marxist" government of Allende in 1973, are once again restless. At the same time middle class "housewives" have taken to the streets, banging pots and pans as they did in 1973. As we go to press new strikes by workers in the transport industries and calls by the middle class for "democracy now" reveal the depth of the economic and political crisis.

Before 1973 Allende tried to solve the capitalist crisis in Chile by printing money. This led to a fall in workers' living standards as inflation rocketed to 600% a year. Under Pinochet Chile has been handed over to the "Chicago Boys", the followers of Milton Friedman (the economist behind the present Tory economic policies in Britain). Alongside Pinochet's brutal suppression of the workers by the indiscriminate use of torture and murder, these Chicago gangsters started a policy of "tight money" and massive spending cuts. Chile was soon held up as a marvel of monetarism. The economy grew on average by 7.2% a year from 1977-81 (when Britain's was actually stagnant), inflation fell from 600% in 1973 to 9% in 1981, tariffs were lowered from 105% to 10% and exports rose dramatically. This "Chilean miracle", however, was based on massive international borrowing so that today Chile owes 17½ billion dollars. To pay off the interest on this debt alone takes 80% of Chile's export revenue and the country's reserves have fallen by 75% since 1979. In the same period production fell by 14% and unemployment has risen to 32%. In a word, Chile is bankrupt. Only further loans and "gifts" from the IMF (i.e. from US imperialism which is anxious to maintain the Pinochet regime) have prevented a further financial collapse (the country's 12 leading banks have already collapsed).

The question now is not, "Will Pinochet go?" but "When?". On the basis of a rigged referendum in September 1980 Pinochet is supposed to stay in power until 1997, but already 5 of the political parties dissolved in 1973 have re-formed and are calling for an

"immediate return to democracy".

At the sound of this word the alarm bells are ringing for the Chilean working class. Once the middle class opposition gets re-organised it will promote a new saviour (probably, unlike Allende, acceptable to US imperialism) who will restore democracy. Workers will be urged to struggle to overthrow Pinochet and after having made the greatest sacrifices in blood, will then be asked to make more sacrifices to restore the economy. It is the same capitalist cry the whole world over - "If you (i.e. the workers) make sacrifices, we (i.e. the bosses) will pull through". The workers should remember that it was their initial support for the Allende regime and their illusions in his "democracy" which led to the weakening of their resistance to the attacks made on them by Allende and finally ended in the massacres of 1973. Nor should they be taken in again that one set of capitalists will make a better set of bosses than another.

This was the role of the Allende Government. Using the threat of fascism to persuade workers not to strike and "rock the boat", Allende lost a lot of working class support. He used the army under his Commander-in-Chief, Pinochet, to force striking copper miners back to work. His supporters, loyal to the democratic face of capitalism, successfully persuaded the rest of Chile's workers to accept this, thus holding back the possibility of united class struggle. To make sure, Allende invited Fidel Castro from Cuba to come and assure the workers in Chile that working harder under Allende was in the interests of "anti-imperialism". Once Allende had served his purpose for the capitalist class, US imperialism, in the shape of the Chilean army and with the support of the middle class, disposed of him and put Pinochet in his place. The workers had been so weakened and divided by the left of capital that they were unable to resist the campaign of mass murder which followed. The copper miners in particular could see no reason to resist a political change in the ruling class which replaced one of their enemies with another. In fact the miners were so bitter at the left for having sabotaged their strike and their attempts to spread it that many of them initially welcomed the coup!

Workers should know that they have no interest in the disputes between large and

small capitalists about how best to exploit their labour power. They should know that democracy and dictatorship are simply two sides of capital's permanent class dictatorship. This should be particularly clear to the workers in Chile, who have seen capitalism use Allende and Pinochet, capital's left and right, to attack them simultaneously on two fronts: ideologically and physically.

Already the trade unions are showing, as they did under Allende, how they undermine the class struggle. Although the military regime has imprisoned many of their leaders and subjected them to torture, the unions play the same containing role as they do in democratic countries. When there is a real possibility of mass strikes breaking out which could easily go beyond immediate economic demands and calls for the overthrow of Pinochet, the unions divide the working class.

Thus, when the copper miners at El Salvador struck in June (to obtain the release from prison of a local union leader), against the wishes of the union, they found themselves isolated by the unions' opposition to solidarity strikes by other workers. Without the active support of the rest of the class (as well as copper miners in other areas) it was easy for the police to crush the strike, leaving the way open for the bosses to sack 919 strikers.

However, there are signs that as the international economy collapses, throughout South America workers are no longer accepting the leadership of one or other bosses' faction. Already workers in Sao Paulo, Brazil, have shown their contempt for capitalist democracy by rioting against the new liberal governor, Montoro. As the crisis throws thousands out of work (where there isn't any dole) Latin America's bosses may try to play the democratic card to hold back the workers. In the crumbling, debt-ridden economies of South America it's not so easy for the democratic parties and the trade unions to con the working class into abandoning its struggle. The workers of Latin America are showing their ability to fight both right-wing terror and left-wing lies. They must take this understanding to the level of creating their own political organisations to lead the struggle against all capitalism's faces, whether these are democratic or dictatorships.

In Defence of THE LAW OF VALUE

One of the tasks of a revolutionary group is to arm the working class with arguments. This also means educating its members and sympathisers. As a part of this work, we are publishing in this issue an account of the Marxist theory of value, or the law of value. Marx's law of value explains our whole economic outlook, and in particular the idea of the falling rate of profit. With this we can explain why we say today that capitalism is in the stage of decline or decadence. In short, an understanding of the labour theory of value explains why communist and revolutionary politics are the only way out for the working class today.

Q WHY ARE THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE NOT FREE?

A. Our lives are dominated by objects that are produced for sale, which we call commodities. However, there are still some things which cost nothing. The water from a mountain stream, driftwood we burn, or wild fruit we gather. Not that such things are not useful (they have "use value" in Marx's term). They are certainly as useful as the water in our tap, wood from the merchant, or food from the shop, yet for all these we have to pay. For the same object we sometimes pay and we sometimes do not. The reason for this cannot be because of a difference in the use value of the objects (since water, for example is the same whatever the source). It must lie in the fact that one object acquires a price (that is, an exchange value) through being the product of human labour.

It is impossible for today's society to exist as hunters and gatherers and the water we drink, fuel that heats us, food that we eat, are all produced by the labour of others who themselves sell their own ability to work (their labour power) in order to exist. So, although an object found, gathered or received as a gift may give us the greater pleasure - since it doesn't involve a commodity relationship - the vast bulk of our consumption is of commodities which are the product of human labour, and hence, have their price.

Q WHY DO DIFFERENT COMMODITIES HAVE DIFFERENT VALUES?

A. Since all commodities are the product of human labour, their different values result from the different amounts of human labour involved in their production. The amount of labour needed to bring a gallon of oil to the pump is greater than that to bring a gallon of water to our taps and the difference in price reflects this, or as the bourgeois saying has it, "Time is money." This can best be seen by comparing Britain with Saudi Arabia where the amount of labour required to obtain a gallon of water is greater than that required to produce a gallon of oil. This shows perfectly how the law of value works. Put in a nutshell, the Marxist theory of value is that the value of a commodity is equal to the average labour time needed to produce it. Marxists call this "socially necessary" labour time, because it is obvious that some workers are more productive than others, especially if they use better machines and tools. So what we must do is calculate the amount of labour time needed as an average for all society.

"Socially necessary labour time is the labour time required to produce a use value under existing social conditions of production, and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour." (*Capital* Vol. 1 p. 7)

Q BUT HOW CAN WE WORK OUT THE VALUE OF LABOUR POWER?

A. Labour power in a capitalist society is a commodity - it is something which can be bought and sold. It is only unlike other commodities because it is measured, not by the scales, but by the clock, to use Marx's phrase. The value of this commodity is calculated in the same way as any other, by the amount of socially necessary labour needed to "produce" it. This means that the value of labour power is decided by the value of the food, clothing, etc., of the worker which he or she needs for the survival of himself/herself and dependants.

"The value of labour power is determined by the labour time necessary for the production of this specific article . . . the labour time necessary for the production of (its) means of subsistence." (*Capital* Vol I p.158)

Q IF COMMODITIES ARE SOLD AT THEIR VALUE AND LABOUR POWER IS PAID AT VALUE, WHERE DO PROFITS COME FROM?

A. Before Marx the illusion existed that profit was a kind of swindle. Profit used to be seen as the amount added on to the cost of producing the good when it was sold, so that the seller was cheating the buyer. Although some of the spokesmen of the early capitalist class, like Ricardo, felt that profit was made in the production process, and only realised when commodities were sold, it was Marx who solved the riddle of the source of surplus value and hence the capitalists' profits. He discovered it lay in the exploitation of labour power.

The use value to the capitalist of the labour power of the worker is greater than its exchange value (or cost of reproduction),

"The daily cost of maintenance of labour power, and the daily output of labour power are two very different things. The former determines the exchange value of labour power, the latter its use value." (*Capital* Vol I p.187)

Or, to put it another way, if a worker needs to work for 4 hours to reproduce the value of his labour power, this represents his wages (he is paid the value of his labour power). The remaining 4 hours of his daily labour represent surplus value and this is the source of the capitalists' profit which is created when the worker labours beyond the time necessary to produce the value of his/her labour power.

Q BUT SURELY SOME LABOUR HAS MORE VALUE THAN OTHERS? HOW DOES THIS AFFECT THE LAW OF VALUE?

A. This question is about what is called the "reduction problem" - the reduction of skilled to unskilled labour. Skilled labour sells at a higher price than unskilled labour,

and Marx took account of this. He argued that the production of skilled labour took more time, due to training, etc., than that of unskilled labour. Hence the value, and therefore the price, of skilled labour is higher. "Costs of training must also be included among the elements of value expended for the production of labour power." (Marx op. cit. p.159). But the extra payment for skilled labour is not a deduction from the capitalists' profit, but is part of the total value of any commodity made with the help of skilled labour power when it is sold.

Q BUT IS LABOUR THE ONLY SOURCE OF EXCHANGE VALUE? WHAT ABOUT MACHINERY?

A. Machinery, like raw materials, produces no new value on its own. Machines can only pass on their acquired value to the commodities produced when labour power is applied to production. A machine without labour produces no value, only rust. Only labour produces more value than it takes to produce it. This is why Marx called the capital used to pay wages variable capital and the capital used to pay for machines and raw materials constant capital. As Marx said of machinery,

"The only way in which the products of past labour can be made to retain and to realise their character as use values is by incorporating them into the labour process." (op. cit. p.176)

Q BUT WOULDN'T THIS MEAN A FULLY AUTOMATED FACTORY WOULD NOT PRODUCE SURPLUS VALUE OR PROFITS?

A. Even a fully automated factory would exploit the labour of maintenance, cleaning and programming workers, but this would only produce a small amount of surplus value. However, the factory would be able to sell its products at a profit, since it would be competing with factories that did create surplus value and it could sell its products much above their actual value. That is, it would create little surplus value, but would make profits, due to the fact that competition tends to equal out the rates of profit in different firms.

If the entire productive apparatus of the world could be fully automated, capitalism would not only produce little surplus value but also little profits, and it would collapse. But this is a science fiction situation. Long before it could automate to this extent, it would have run out of the profits to be able to do so. What is technically possible for capitalism is not economically possible.

Q BUT LAND, EVEN WHEN LEFT ALONE, PRODUCES THINGS. SURELY LAND AS WELL AS LABOUR IS PRODUCTIVE?

A. Land left to itself produces use values, which cost nothing if used for subsistence. They only have exchange value and a price if labour is used to prepare them to produce goods for the consumption of others. This would seem to imply that virgin or waste land had no value, and in fact Marx showed that these have no value, though they

do often have a price. For example, the price of virgin land (which is usually sold by government monopoly) is a tax on the future profits of agricultural investment in land and not the magical production of a new source of value by "nature": its price is a deduction from the profits made by the (future) exploitation of agricultural wage labour. Similarly, the landlord who sells land to a capitalist to site a factory is not realising the innate "productivity" of the land, but is creaming off a slice in advance of the expected future surplus value created by the capitalists' proletarians.

Agricultural land which has been worked by labour does, on the other hand, have a value, represented by the socially necessary labour time required to bring it to its level of fertility. But, like machinery, it creates no new value, or surplus value, without "being bathed in the fire of labour" (Marx).

Q YOU SEEM TO IMPLY THAT VALUE AND PRICE ARE THE SAME. DOESN'T THIS OVERTHROW THE LAW OF VALUE?

A. The most common criticism of the law of value is that it does not provide a theory of prices. Marx wrote a lot about the conversion of values to prices, and this is now called the "transformation" problem. This does not arise in small-scale commodity production for a limited market, where, barring accidents, the price of a commodity is roughly the same as its value. But with the development of large scale industry and a world market, prices began to deviate from



Gold is worth nothing whilst in the ground. Its high price is not because it is scarce but because to produce one ounce of gold requires a large number of hours of labour in prospecting for mines and in extracting and processing the ore in which gold is found. This gives it a high value.

values. Clearly the values of commodities in the same line of production produced by different capitals which have a different level of living labour and dead labour (machinery) in the production process (Marx called this the organic composition of capital)- are different. However, due to competition, their prices in the market place are roughly similar. The low composition capital is forced to sell below value and the high composition can sell above value and make an extra profit. In other words, the deviations balance one another. What capitalist economists don't understand is that Marx wasn't interested in a vulgar price theory, but the surplus value produced on capital as a whole, and that at that level price is equivalent to value, or as Marx succinctly put it,

"The deviation of prices from values mutually balance one another ... In the same way the sum of all the prices of production of all commodities in society, comprising the totality of all lines of production, is equal to the sum of their values." (op.cit. Vol III p.188)

Even though it doesn't determine individual prices, the law of value "dominates the movement of prices" or 'regulates the movement of prices', as Marx put it. And,

"If the labour time required for their production (i.e. commodities) happens to shrink, prices fall, if it increases prices rise, provided other considerations remain the same." (op.cit. p177)

In fact Marx argues that prices are determined by the costs of production, plus the average rate of profit. But only the law of value can explain why costs of production are, for example, £100 and the average rate of profit 10% rather than 20%. And what really concerns Marx is the organic composition of capital as a whole and the decline in variable capital and hence the rate of profit.

Q BUT IF WORKERS' LIVING LABOUR IS THE ONLY SOURCE OF SURPLUS VALUE, WHY DO CAPITALISTS AUTOMATE AND SUPPRESS THE SOURCE OF PROFIT?

A. Marx said "The larger the variable capital (living labour), the larger the amount of value and surplus value produced (op.cit. Vol I p.315), and for capitalism as a system, the suppression of living labour is the basis for its downfall. However, individual capitalists are forced to invest by competition since the capitalist investing in new machinery which raises output per worker can produce cheaper commodities than his rivals, and drive them to the wall. In order to stay in business, capitalists are forced by 'the immanent laws of competition' to invest and raise the organic composition of capital, thus lowering the average rate of profit. This explains why capitalism is a system which must "expand or die" and why it is also a crisis-ridden economic system (as well as a very dynamic system).

Q SURELY SUPPLY AND DEMAND INFLUENCE PRICES?

Clearly supply and demand are factors which, along with those already analysed by Marx, will cause prices to deviate from their values. But such a theory really begs the question as to the point around which the fluctuation caused by supply and demand takes place. It is like saying that illness determines temperature, without explaining that it does so around a "normal" level of body heat. What determines the normal level of prices around which fluctuations take place?

Also, what determines the so-called law of supply and demand in the first place? It is not arbitrary, but comes from the division of wealth between the social classes and the relations of exploitation in production, i.e. (aside from "accidents" or disasters) it is determined by the law of value, and doesn't in itself provide an independent explanation of either value or price.

Q BUT WOULDN'T THE USEFULNESS OF AN OBJECT AFFECT ITS VALUE, INDEPENDENT OF THE LABOUR INVOLVED IN ITS PRODUCTION?

A. The utility theory argues that it is the usefulness of a commodity, from the consumer's viewpoint, that determines its value and price. This is pure subjectivism, not a scientific analysis. Capitalist economists claim by this theory that, for example, a washing machine has a value of £200 because individual consumers are prepared to pay that price for it. The act of purchase is supposed to prove the value of the commodity. This is nothing more than saying value is market price, with no means of explaining why price should be as it is. An assertion replaces an explanation. How can we say that two objects of equal price have equal utility? How can utility be measured? Is the utility of a washing

machine which costs £200 identical to that of a camera which costs the same amount? All we can say is that their prices are equal. Even in terms of the shifting sands of utility, many of the cheapest commodities (e.g. matches) are the most useful and some of the most useless are the most expensive.

Utility also reverses the relationship which exists in the real world between production and the market, because this theory argues that price changes are determined by changes in utility. But the price of calculators didn't fall because their usefulness declined, but because the labour time required for their production did! The theory of utility explains nothing at all, but simply records market behaviour and calls this a "theory".

The law of value remains the only scientific theory of value and the only one which sees that the value of commodities lies in the production process. Although Marx allowed for fluctuations due to supply and demand, and explained how values are transformed into prices, none of these factors deny the explanatory power of the law of value. Neither can the law of value be abandoned and the idea of surplus value be kept, since this is simply saying that in addition to labour and its exploitation, there can be "other" sources of profit for capitalism. This would mean that the idea of the falling rate of profit, which hinges on the idea that only the exploitation of labour produces profit, would be meaningless. Thus an understanding of, and the ability to defend, the labour theory of value is central to communist politics●

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6 Communists are often accused of using jargon which means nothing to workers. Words like "imperialist" are often seen as simply a form of abuse of something we don't like. It's true we are opposed to everything 'imperialist' but for us this means something precise and concrete. At its most basic imperialism is the extortion by the most advanced capitalist countries of the product of the exploited in the economically backward areas. Only an understanding of imperialism can explain why, despite so-called "aid" the poor areas of the world are getting poorer and that the quality of life for two-thirds of the world has declined compared to almost any time during the last four or five centuries. This isn't because of the inbuilt wickedness of individuals but because of the iron laws of imperialism. Imperialism is capitalism in decline and it demands more and more profit to offset the fall in the average rate of profit. In the advanced countries the rise in unemployment to record levels, the automation of production are all attempts to cheapen the cost of production and thus increase profits. In the less advanced countries workers are forced to work for a pittance in appalling conditions as part of the need to make sacrifices for the god of

IMPERIALISM

profit.

And as the advanced capitalists manoeuvre to control areas where they might find cheap labour, cheap raw materials, bigger markets and also bases to defend their control of such areas, this leads to imperialist war. In fact it has led to a state of almost permanent war since 1914, including the two most widespread and destructive wars in history. Today there are 39 local wars raging around the world, spread over 5 continents, and none of them would have carried on so long if it had not been for the imperialist superpowers of Russia and America who arm and support the various sides in the hope of defending or gaining an advantage. There are of course self-styled "marxists" and "communists" who deny that Russia is the same as America, but in doing so they are actually playing the imperialist game. Since the Russian workers lost

control of their own revolution in the early Twenties Russia has been no less imperialist than any other major capitalist power. In World War Two Russia entered an alliance with the USA which ended with them destroying German dominance in Europe and the British Empire. But when the thieves fell out it set the stage for a new imperialist rivalry.

Today the imperialist struggle for the globe between the superpowers, forced on by the economic crisis of both East and West, is reaching new heights and inevitably will end in a Third World War unless the world working class wakes up to the fact that when it acts collectively it is the greatest power of them all. In the meantime the two articles which follow show in a concrete way how the two imperialist superpowers are acting in two of the world's "hot spots".

Russian Roulette in the Lebanon

With Syria's refusal to accept the US plan for withdrawal of Syrian and Israeli troops from the Lebanon the area looks set for yet another inter-imperialist battle in which thousands of civilians will be slaughtered to satisfy the bestial appetite of imperialism. If it does occur it will be the fifth time in 25 years that the area will have been the scene for the confrontation of the superpowers. The myth that Lebanon was the peaceful area in a region torn by fighting was rudely shattered one morning in 1958 by US marines storming the beaches of Beirut. To the astonishment of the well-heeled tourists sunbathing there, the US Sixth Fleet had arrived to ensure that the US puppet government of Christian Lebanese parties stayed in power despite internal divisions.

Guarding Israel's northern flank and acting as the banking centre for Western capitalism to exploit the Middle East (it was not called "the Switzerland of the Middle East" for nothing), the Lebanon is vital for the West. This invasion succeeded in stabilising the regime but when, with the victory of the US in winning over successive Arab governments from Russia the Palestinians arrived in the midst of an already divided country, the result was open civil war, an invasion of the East of the country by Syria, the disintegration of Lebanon into small zones ruled by local warlords like Gemayel and Haddad, and, finally - in 1978 and 1982 - invasions by Israel. At the present time there are 12 foreign armies occupying the Lebanon, besides the large number of "militia" and private armies.

All this is a product of an inter-imperialist struggle for a key area of the globe. The Middle East, from Turkey to Iran, is a vital strategic area and major source of the oil supplies of Western countries. In the struggle for the planet between the imperialist superpowers, pro-Russian governments in these countries would be a disaster for the USA. Thus the US has worked very hard to keep Russian influence to a minimum in the area. This is why the US wants "peace" in the Middle East. So far the Pax Americana policy has been very successful. With the signing of the Camp David agreement between Israel and Egypt in 1978 Egypt became yet another US puppet. Before the Iran-Iraq war began in 1980 Russia's allies in the area were reduced to three: Syria, Libya and the decrepit Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Even here the PLO's leader, Arafat, recognised in the late 70's that "The Americans hold all the cards". And Russian imperialism suffered its final humiliation exactly a year ago when the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the taking of Beirut cost 90

Syrian-owned MiG aircraft and the destruction of the SAM missile sites in the Beka'a Valley by Israelis flying US-built Phantom jet bombers.

However, the US government took little satisfaction from yet another demonstration of the superiority of their technology. The whole strategy of the US is based on holding the Camp David status quo in the Middle East. Israel's invasion of the Lebanon, they were told, was for 72 hours only (the Israeli Army also told its own government the same thing) but it became a political nightmare. The wholesale destruction of Tyre and Sidon in which



Israeli troops in Lebanon

thousands were killed was followed by the Israeli-condoned massacre of Chatila and Sabra refugee camps. Israel has not achieved its aim of destroying the Palestinian ability to launch attacks on Northern Galilee and thus it cannot withdraw until it has. Replacing Israeli troops with Haddad's army in Southern Lebanon is the basis of their planned withdrawal. Syria's refusal to agree to its own withdrawal has placed the Israelis in a cleft stick. If they stay in Lebanon Israel will be divided. 500 Israeli soldiers have been killed and 26,000 have been wounded there in the last 12 months and there is already a movement amongst the troops against conscription. 25% of Israelis have been excused conscription, but even so more than forty others are in prison for refusing to serve. The liberal peace movement calling for withdrawal is gathering momentum. At the same time a 50% inflation rate is leading to the outbreak of ever-wider strikes, such as that of the El Al airline workers. On the other hand to withdraw would mean that the invasion had achieved nothing and Syria would remain in Lebanon.

All this is to Russia's advantage. The Syrian refusal to withdraw from Lebanon and the recent threats to Arafat's leadership of the PLO are both due to Russian pressure. To take the PLO first, the faction fight at present going on

in the PLO is to "persuade" Arafat to abandon his "moderate" line (i.e. he appears ready to agree to the next stage of the USA's Camp David policy and accept a Palestinian mini-state on the West Bank of the Jordan). This would mean the total victory of "pax americana" in the Middle East. This is why Russia and Syria are encouraging the revolt against Arafat. Either he will have to toe the line or he will be overthrown. The faction fights in the PLO are a clear example of how all national movements are simply pawns of whichever imperialist power supplies them with material aid.

Russia is taking more of a gamble with its policy in Syria. Russia is behind Syria's refusal of the US-Israel plan for withdrawal from the Lebanon. It has re-equipped Syria after last year's losses with the most up-to-date military hardware that she has got. For the first time ever SAM 5 rockets are being deployed outside Russia to defend Damascus, Hama and Hama. An example of Syrian war-mongering confidence was the recent military manoeuvres held in the Golan Heights. Russia itself has shown it sees war as likely - it has already evacuated its embassy staff from Beirut. It is a measure of Russian desperation to prevent total US domination of the area that it is prepared to rely on Syria to reverse the humiliations of the recent past.

So imperialism is preparing for another war in the area. Its chief victims will as always be the exploited and oppressed masses of the region. They will be called upon to defend the property of their exploiters whether they be Syrian, Palestinian, Israeli, or Lebanese. In an area where a national minority like the Palestinians is particularly oppressed, it is much easier for imperialism to pretend that support for this national cause must be more "progressive" than any other. But the fate of the Palestinian working class in the Lebanon shows this to be a lie. Support for "national liberation" is simply support for plain nationalism. Support for nationalism means support for defending ones "own" country and this means fighting in imperialist wars. This means defending the bosses property and fighting those who are in the same position in "enemy" country. Against this the only defence the workers in the Middle East have is to use their power to act together to carry out strikes in defence of their own living standards whatever the cost to the national economy. This is what revolutionary defeatism means in practice today. And actions like these will ultimately lead to workers in uniform on an international scale turning the guns which imperialism has put in their hands against the local imperialist puppets - their "own" rulers. And whilst the workers of the Middle East could be the first to break the imperialist mould, at the end of the day it will be up to workers in the centres of imperialist power in Europe and America to complete the task that the workers in the "dependent" countries begin.

Nicaragua: A New Act in the Central American Tragedy

Central America occupies a major position among the "hot spots" of the world, being perhaps second in importance only to the Middle East areas. And like every other "hot spot" Central America cannot escape the attention of the competing imperialist super-powers who have once again heated up the crisis in this region.

All the Central American countries share the deepest poverty and therefore are the breeding ground for deep contradictions that shake the economic and political institutions of the area to their very foundations. They also share the geographical fact of belonging to an area of great strategic importance. This makes them extremely tasty to the notorious appetites of the competing imperialist powers. Two thirds of all the seaborne traffic (including oil) of the USA passes through the Caribbean Sea, and, in the event of a European war so would half the military supplies destined for the NATO countries. It is for these reasons, besides the obvious motive of super-exploitation of the economic resources of the Central American countries that the USA feels worried about what might happen in the area in the near future, especially since it includes pro-Russian, "socialist" Cuba. This makes it the USA's soft underbelly and the most suitable area for massive penetration by the competing imperialism of the USSR. The worries of the USA increased enormously when the pro-Soviet Sandinista regime emerged victoriously from a guerrilla war against the pro-American dictator Somoza and then allied with Cuba. The events in Nicaragua have not remained purely Nicaraguan and have gone on to infect neighbouring countries, especially El Salvador. Here a



GUERRILLA WAR IN EL SALVADOR:

Workers must take the lead in turning such wars into a civil war of class against class.

bitter guerrilla war is raging largely led by the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN) which is trying to overthrow the military regime that rules the country.

The usefulness of such a movement to the interests of Russia is obvious. This usefulness is rewarded with a large amount of economic aid precious war materials via Cuba, and, of course, Nicaragua. These in turn are "aided" by many other countries like the Russian satellites of Bulgaria, East Germany, Libya, and North Korea.

How is the USA trying to hold back the Soviet advance? As usual it is with aggression, though of an indirect kind, within the "endangered" countries. This indirect aggression is carried out through the formation of mercenary armies, closely linked to pro-Somoza "guerrilla" groups which carry out their attacks on the Sandinistas in Nicaragua from Washington's faithful ally, Honduras. Reagan has got the CIA to do this whilst he tries to get Congress to pass a programme of military aid costing \$600 millions in 1984. On other occasions this type of project would have created deep divisions between the different ruling factions of the US

bourgeoisie. But on this occasion everyone has kept their mouths shut; the Democrats have only pretended to disagree, calling for economic instead of military aid (as if receiving weapons or the money for buying them was two different things).

What is the "revolutionary" Sandinista regime doing in the meantime? Besides attempting to repel the pro-Somoza invaders it is appealing to the Security Council of the United Nations calling for;

- 1) the unconditional withdrawal of the "forces of genocide" introduced to Nicaragua by the US.
- 2) the permanent withdrawal of warships from Nicaragua's territorial waters
- 3) the end of reconnaissance flights over Nicaraguan air space
- 4) the ending of US secret service finance for the organisation of forces, openly or secretly, directed against Nicaragua, and finally
- 5) it asks the USA to use its influence not to plan acts of aggression against Nicaragua but to seek a negotiated diplomatic settlement to re-establish stability in Central America.

Against the arrogant and brutal policy of the USA a unanimous chorus of condemnation has been raised. This has been followed by professions of solidarity (at least so far as the Leftists are concerned) for a Sandinista regime "seriously menaced by imperialism" (imperialism here means only US imperialism). Why do the Sandinistas get such recognition and such general support? Who are the so-called Sandinistas quoted by anyone who feels like it, as the symbol of the right of peoples to self-determination? Ever since its birth Sandinism has been the form of expression for Nicaraguan nationalism. It is a movement of the Left national bourgeoisie, influenced by the Kremlin, and its "marxism-leninism", or rather the economic and political theories of state capitalism in Russian dress. The existence of such a movement is linked to the miserable conditions of the proletariat and all the oppressed masses in Nicaragua, as well as a great feeling of hatred for the USA which is rightly held to be the cause of the misery throughout the country.

But the lack of a revolutionary leadership which is able to point out to the exploited masses the bourgeois nature of the Sandinistas also contributes to the success of that movement. And so the Sandinistas are framing a new picture, that of total future dependence on another imperialist centre, the equally brutal and predatory USSR. The workers of Nicaragua, like workers all over the world, have to develop the conviction for the need to struggle only for the interests of the communist revolution. Without it there can be no future that is independent of the iron laws of capitalist exploitation.

The most immediate problem of the revolutionary movement today isn't easy sentimental support for Sandinism but that of building a real force around this theme of communist revolution. And this can only come about one way - that of the class struggle. Absent from the region at the moment the communists, wherever they are, must carry out the task of organising and inciting the class struggle against capital. By materially developing the political education of the masses on the problems created by imperialism, this will help to give correct guidance to the most conscious amongst the Central American working class. To these elements will almost certainly fall the honour of constructing the revolutionary party of the working class.

(From Battaglia Comunista No.8 Year XLI May 20th to June 10th 1983)

For anyone who thinks that Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Republic in Iran has done anything to change the lot of the working masses in the region the following reports (received by us recently from the SUCM) reveal otherwise.

The report on child labour in Kamyaran shows that the super-exploitation, not only of adults, but also of children continues. Clearly there have been no gains for the working class under Khomeini. Our most recent information from Kurdistan, where Khomeini is stepping up his attacks against the Kurds, demonstrates what an Islamic Republic really means. On May 23rd 12 families from Mahabad were forcibly exiled and 37 other families told by the regime to prepare for exile. In the same area, on June 2nd, 59 people were executed after being tried before courts of the Islamic Republic. Islamic justice was meted out quickly. All 59 were executed, including those who had been given 3-10 years gaol sentences.

But even in the face of such brutal state terror, the working class in Iran has not been cowed into complete submission. For example, the bosses in the Majdiyan-e-Noh Co. of Tehran - a construction firm with a 3,000 workforce - were forced to give in when the workers struck against their attempts to force them to do overtime and in protest at the death of one worker. The report continues:

"The workers realised that wages for the strike days and also the wages for days they had worked were not being paid....The workers then started their sit-in, the police arrived, entered the workshop, arrested a few of the strikers and took them to the Evin prison. But the workers continued their struggle and formulated their demands as follows:

1. The wages for the 4 days that workers went on strike must be paid;
2. The expulsion of workers must be stopped;
3. Any overtime work which has not been paid must be noted on their cards;
4. Every 15 days workers must be allocated an allowance to be paid within 48 hours of the beginning of each month.

Eventually the management backed down in the face of the united action of the workers and accepted their demands. The workers immediately received the wages of the 4 days of the strike and the strike ended.

CHILD LABOUR

In the small town of Kamyaran the Islamic Republic's so-called Construction Crusade (Jahad-e-Sazandegi) has set up a cloth-weaving workshop. The majority of workers here are children and youngsters. The working day is 10 hours long. Each child receives only 35 tonans per day (less than £2) and the wages of adults are 70 tonans ... In order to meet a small part of their living expenses, which along with soaring inflation, has drained the workers of their vitality, they have to do a number of hours overtime. In this workshop the workers have to work on Friday (the customary day off) or else they are finished.

GILAN-RASHT STRIKE

Over 30,000 textile workers struck against the theft and anti-working class activity of the factory's Islamic Society. The workers' slogan was: "Death to Sharify" (the Society's head) and "The Islamic Society must be dissolved!" Sympathy strikes broke out in the Rasht battery company which were eventually crushed by the regime.

IRAN/IRAQ WAR POSTER

Send £1 to group address for 5 copies of the poster on the Iran/Iraq war produced by the CWO and the PCInt (Battaglia Comunista).

□ Communists have the task of showing that exploitation of the working class is the same the whole world over, whatever the degree of brutality used to back it up. In this issue we have tried to show how imperialism operates in areas like Chile and Iran. Readers who want to find out more about Iran can do so in Bolshevik Message obtainable from SUCM, BM Box 3004, London, WCLN 3XX, UK.

WORKERS VOICE

The Real Meaning of, Mitterand's 'Socialism'

Over the past few months, reports from France in the British media have presented a picture of a socialist government struggling to subdue a right-wing backlash against its socialist policies. It's true that France has a relatively large number of petit bourgeois (small farmers and small businessmen) who aren't slow to turn to violent demonstrations to defend their petty privileges. Recently farmers have demonstrated against the EEC, and law and medical students, senior hospital doctors and right-wing policemen have demonstrated for "union rights". The capitalist press calls this an "anti-socialist insurrection" (*Guardian* April 1983). This is against a 'socialist' government which includes among its policies an austerity programme, and a programme of deportation of immigrant workers, and an extension of conscription and increased military spending.

In the following article a French comrade of the CWO examines the situation in France from the working class standpoint. From here the picture is different. Instead of a socialist government facing right wing reaction we see a nationalist capitalist government working to improve French capital's competitiveness by launching familiar attacks on workers' jobs and living standards. This article shows that in "socialist" France no less than in Tory Britain the trade unions and left wing parties are sabotaging the class struggle.

As country after country staggers under the effects of the economic crisis, options for the bourgeoisie are narrowing and whatever political fraction is in power it becomes more and more difficult to see any real difference between a right-wing policy and a left-wing one. In fact governments are changing just to carry on similar attacks, bringing unemployment, inflation and harsher working conditions to the working class the world over. Working class expectations which had risen following the coming to power of the left in France in May 1981 have quickly vanished but disillusionment with the left amongst the workers has not been translated into a significant fight back. Some sections of the class (mainly car workers) have tried to resist but have been quickly led to defeat by the unions and over the last few months the "social scene" has been mainly occupied by middle-class movements (peasants, professionals, shopkeepers and students).

THE ECONOMIC SITUATION

To understand recent developments, it is necessary to outline their economic background. After a short period of increased state spending in order to stimulate demand, the government implemented its first "rigour" plan ("rigour" is the left wing euphemism for austerity) - small increases in the minimum wage and in family allowances introduced in the period of "left euphoria" were replaced with a four-month wage freeze whilst rents, electricity, gas and transport prices rose. In the meantime inflation (10-12% a year) continued to erode workers' wages. Obviously to maintain credibility with the workers the unions said that this was not the correct policy for fighting the crisis, but when workers in the car industry struck, the unions did their utmost to prevent the struggle spreading.

A few years ago there was a saying - "When Renault sneezes, France has a cold". Thanks to the antibiotic effect of the unions, such an outcome has been avoided and the Renault workers went back to work with a meagre 11% wage increase (just enough to match inflation) and this after weeks of sporadic strikes.

In addition, reduction of the working week from 40 to 39 hours which the left and the unions called a "social conquest" has only served as an excuse to introduce greater flexibility and increase exploitation (including a 4% wage reduction). To fight unemployment, the government has encouraged early retirement but since pensioners are now subjected to higher tax cuts in social

benefits, the trick won't work long. At the same time youth training schemes (650,000) have been intensified to the point where MAUROY is now claiming to have stabilised unemployment and even to have reduced it. This ploy can only work for so long; when their training period is over all these young people will join the job queues.

Generally, the economic situation is deteriorating. Short-time working is now a common feature for workers in many sections (car industry, building...) jobs are being axed in steel, mining and textiles. Despite restructuring and rationalisation which have sent many workers down the road, despite 3 devaluations of the franc in 18 months, the French trade figures are still worrying the capitalist class.

UNION TACTICS

When in March this year Prime Minister MAUROY announced his second "rigour" plan in the space of a year, the unions once again played their familiar lamentation music and decided to organise actions of protest - several weeks after the new measures had been implemented!

Another weapon used by the government against the workers has been the strengthening of the power of the trade unions. This operation called "democratisation of the workplace" simply means that the unions now enjoy extended legal facilities to organise information meetings - the bosses view them not harmful to production (despite the fact that these are held during working time), since the end result is a temporary welcome passivity of the workers who feel disoriented: on the one hand, they are told that the present government is not doing enough for the workers, but on the other they are asked not to undertake "irresponsible" actions that might weaken the "socialist" government and ultimately play into the hands of the right-wing waiting in the wings.

The unions are organising "responsible" i.e. useless actions like petition campaigns, calling on the workers to lobby reluctant bosses and forcing them to collaborate with the government instead of investing outside or moving their capital to Switzerland. In short, workers are told if things are not really going well with the left in power, its mainly because of bosses' sabotage. And the unions themselves are suggesting solutions to improve the competitiveness of French products on the world market. The CGT slogan is "let's produce French!" and CFTD leader EDMOND MAIRE himself has been arguing in favour of more rigour.

In this context of "national effort" and low working class struggle, the strata to have come to the fore have been those petit bourgeois elements mentioned above who have been hit by the deteriorating economic situation and the measures of the left. But the government (echoed in this by the unions) has skillfully portrayed these middle class movements as a "plot" by the right wing aimed at destabilising the present "socialist" government. The workers have been warned that a "come-back" of the right (which was in power for 25 years) is the greatest threat to the gains supposedly won since May 1981. Mitterand has used this threat to stave off a class response to his austerity programme and has warned workers not to harm the momentum of the nation. Making his own contribution to this diversionary campaign, the Trotskyist leader ALAIN KRIVINE has planned a national antifascist and anti-racist demonstration to rally all democracy lovers and push back the forces of reaction.

This weapon was used in the past by the left parties and trade unionists to justify the slaughter of millions of workers in World War II. It comes as no surprise that the leftists are once again doing their best to save capitalism by invoking the defence of democracy and spreading illusions that Mitterand's is a socialist government. It remains to be seen how long the working class will heed calls for restraint at a time when ever-worsening living conditions undermine the basis of these illusions.

REVIEW: 'Vietnam',
Channel 4 TV series

Vietnam

This documentary could have made use of its extensive research and resources to show why capitalism necessarily means war. It fails to do so because its producers do not recognise the government of Vietnam as capitalist.

The 2nd world war never stopped in Vietnam. In 1945 it was 'liberated' by the Allies, who used Japanese troops to suppress workers' revolts. A more effective attack on the working class was carried out by Ho Chi Minh, who during the war had worked for the Americans. The Allied forces had some difficulty in preventing insurrections among the workers of Saigon. Ho's Communist Party attempted to persuade the workers to surrender their arms, and when this didn't work, he used the VietMinh to suppress the workers' militia. Those militia who refused to fight for the Vietminh, and demanded instead to bear arms under the red flag of the working class, were ruthlessly smashed. The last of these was the militia of the Go Vap tram depot, which finally succumbed to the Vietminh on 13 Jan 1946.

The Vietminh then handed power to the British and French, and in Hanoi, to the Chinese and the French. From this time on, France, Britain, China and the USA began terrorising the population of Vietnam in a war which lasted 30 years. Russia contented herself with supporting the Vietminh, after the US president turned down Ho Chi Minh's appeals for an alliance.

'VIETNAM' could have used the mass of historical evidence at its disposal to show the impossibility of national independence, of socialism in one country, and the anti-proletarian nature of Russian imperialism and its nationalist puppets. It made quite clear in the first two episodes that it has no intention of examining the class nature of the Vietnam liberation struggle, and avoids mentioning certain events which reveal it, such as the suppression of the workers in 1945. Instead, the series implicitly exudes sympathy for the NLF (Vietminh); as though there is anything to choose between one capitalist faction and another.

Communists say otherwise. On April 30th 1975 the NLF beat the USA and entered Saigon. The CWO leafletted factories in Britain with a leaflet entitled 'Is Vietnam Communist?' which used the example of Vietnam to destroy the myth that the state capitalist countries are 'anti-imperialist' or 'workers states'. At the same time as the USA lost Vietnam to Russia, it gained China, and soon the workers and rural toilers of Vietnam were dying fighting their class brothers from 'socialist' China and the 'socialist' Khmer Rouge of Cambodia. "The people of Vietnam have been freed from the horror of war" (SOCIALIST WORKER 16.4.83) is a lie. The wars in South East Asia between former allies China Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge (the latter now fully integrated into the USA's military wing in the area, ASEAN) since 1975 have done more than any other events of recent times to show workers the reactionary nature of all national solutions to the crisis of humanity.