

WORKERS VOICE

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CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND
COUNCILIST CONFUSIONS

THE CRISIS OF FINANCE CAPITAL
LESSONS FROM THE MINERS STRIKE

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A SPECTRE IS HAUNTING WORLD CAPITALISM — THE CLASS STRUGGLE

After almost a decade of class quiet the Western European working class is once more beginning to resist the belt-tightening policies of the various governments. The idea that sacrifices now will pave the way for good times round the corner is being challenged. Workers have learned through hard experience that sacrifices today only lead to more sacrifices tomorrow. In Britain the miners have helped to undermine what Thatcher calls a "realistic" attitude by the working class and what could be more accurately called a submissive attitude to the bosses' attacks. In France the recent spate of workers' struggles has helped to undermine the myth that a socialist government is in power. The present fight of metalworkers and printers in West Germany for a 35 hour week (as a way of reducing unemployment) is a sure sign that the "economic miracle" has petered out. In Belgium last year's strikes of 1 million workers have been followed this year by strikes of steelworkers and dockers while unemployed workers have taken to the streets in violent demonstrations. Nowhere can our rulers convince us that sacrifices today mean prosperity tomorrow.

Throughout capitalism's European heartlands the picture is the same. It doesn't matter whether a left-wing (Spain, France, Greece) or right-wing (W. Germany, Britain, Belgium) government is in power; it doesn't matter which school of economists the governments are being advised by; it doesn't matter whether it be northern or southern Europe - all governments are implementing austerity programmes, facing growing unemployment and attempting to restructure or "rationalise" their basic industries in an attempt to maintain their competitive position on the world market. The cost of subsidising the old, unprofitable industries - once the backbone of European capitalism - has become enormous. Governments are desperately trying to pare down industries like steel, shipbuilding and coal in order to divert surplus value into "new technology" zones. It's not just British steelworkers, for example, who have suffered thousands of redundancies. Steel production in Western Europe as a whole has been cut from 126m tons per year in 1980 to 89m tons at present. Steel workers in every country (even Sweden) have experienced job losses (25,000 in Britain after the 1980 strike) and face further threats. Often the announcement of redundancies and plant closures have provoked fierce class struggle by sections of the European working class - for example, French steelworkers in 1979, Belgian steelworkers 1982. This year not only French steelworkers have been fighting "Socialist" plans

to throw them out of a job, Spanish steelworkers have also come under the fire of the "Socialist" riot police's rubber bullets (at Basauri in February) while in Belgium there have been further strikes in the steel sector.

The same goes for all the established sectors of the economy. Throughout Europe thousands of jobs have disappeared and hundreds of thousands more are under threat. Capitalism's constant revolutionising of the means of production has brought us the micro-chip and the computer but the much-vaunted possibilities of the "leisure society" have not materialised. In contrast contemporary capitalism offers workers in the economically advanced countries the enforced idleness and poverty of unemployment or else speed-ups and increased exploitation on the production line. The same process of accumulation which has led capitalism to develop the new technology (the absence of enough surplus value in the traditional industries and the search for more profitable areas of investment) is preventing its further expansion. It would take a massive devaluation of capital on a world scale through another world war before the advanced states could fully "restructure" their economies. By then, of course, there would probably be nothing much left to restructure.

More than ever capitalism's social relations are coming into conflict with the development of the productive forces. This is not only evident in Europe. Capitalism's crisis is a world crisis and is having disastrous effects on the populations and economies of the peripheral areas whose debts are increasing imperialism's stranglehold over them. (See the centre page article in this issue.) In the countries of Latin America, Asia, Africa the crisis doesn't take the sophisticated form of restructuring or rationalisations but simply one of lack of funds as each area finds itself drained of surplus value. The massive national debts and reduction in basic food subsidies, the thousands of unfinished building projects which litter the "3rd World", the factory closures due to lack of raw materials, are only some of the signs of what the crisis means for the working masses of these countries. Unemployment, wage cuts and harsher working conditions in areas where the working class is already super-exploited don't mean the dole (there isn't any), belt-tightening and speed-ups but starvation and the most vicious exploitation. The anger of the working masses in these areas is becoming more and more difficult for governments to contain. From the food riots in Tunisia and Morocco earlier this year, through the strike of dockers in India in March-April, to the 60 killed protesting against 200%

price increases in the Dominican Republic, the working masses of the so-called 3rd World are being driven by desperation to resist the effects of the crisis.

Alongside the social barbarism which is accompanying capitalism's collapse (communal violence in the Punjab and Maharashtra in India and in northern Nigeria to name only three examples) the working and oppressed masses of the underdeveloped areas are demonstrating the reality that the working class is an international class whose interests are the same the world over. Throughout the world the ruling class is haunted by the prospect of more widespread and bitter struggles to come.

THE TWIN ENEMIES: NATIONALISM AND TRADE UNIONISM

In these circumstances the world ruling class is turning more and more to its tried and tested weapons - nationalism and trade unionism. All over the world workers are hearing the same message - that they have more in common with their bosses than with workers in other countries. In Central and South America workers' instinctive hatred of imperialism is being harnessed to nationalism. Workers are joining "national liberation" fronts with the aim of saving the "fatherland" from Yankee imperialism. But the only success such national struggles can have are in delivering the masses over to a new ruling class under the domination of Russian imperialism. (See, for example, "Cuba: Pawn of Imperialism" in *Workers Voice* 15) In Western Europe nationalism is at the basis of the consensus amongst all the established parties that the priority must be to make their own country's industries more competitive against everywhere else. Tariff barriers and import controls are policies of both the left and right (e.g. against Japanese cars or "3rd World" textiles). In the last few years a new wave of anti-Russian hysteria has led to a doubling of Nato's arms bill and has been accompanied by military adventures against minor powers (e.g. Britain against Argentina and France in Chad). The recent 40th anniversary celebration of D-Day was no more than an excuse to bolster national chauvinism and glorify imperialist war.

Foremost in the defence of the "national interest" are the trade unions. At the GCHQ recently they vied with the government to see who could claim to be the most "patriotic", offering no-strike agreements in return for recognition. It is the same in France where the unions have demanded the defence of French steel in the same way as the NUM demands more subsidies for British coal against foreign competition.

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Reinforcing chauvinism has been regionalism and sectionalism. The essence of trade unionism is the belief that workers can defend themselves section by section. Steel union leaders in Britain have refused to support the miners, telling their members that this is the only way to safeguard their own jobs. In France the unions turned the struggle of the steelworkers into a defence of the economic potential of a single region - Lorraine. It was the same kind of argument that ISTC leaders at Ravenscraig used to keep the plant going during the miners strike. In West Germany the IG Metall union is doing its best to keep workers struggles in cars and engineering separate by bringing out different industries in token stoppages. Moreover the unions are not demanding a 35 hour week as legitimate in itself but in order to defuse workers' anger and sidetrack the struggle by arguing that this is a way of solving unemployment in Germany.

THE SPECTRE MADE REAL

The fact is though there are no solutions to be found within the existing national and social framework of capitalism. It is the task of revolutionaries everywhere not only to point this out but to point to how workers can defend their own class interests. This is not just a question of forms of struggle (creating mass organs to fight outside the unions, for example) but a question of political understanding, organisation and leadership: that is, a question of the formation of an international party, armed with the historic programme of working class emancipation which is organised within the working class in the workplaces.

Without a willingness to fight on the part of workers in general there is no possibility of revolutionaries gaining an influence within the day-to-day class struggle. Although the present class battles in Europe haven't yet reached the extent of ten years or so ago (or of Poland in 1980), they are occurring after a period of passivity during which workers have been forced to realise there is no upturn round the corner and in the context of increasing class struggle in the peripheral areas. The left-wing capitalist parties have shown they have no political alternative to offer while the growing bankruptcy of capitalism is leaving the trade unions with less and less room to manoeuvre. Given this situation, the rising tide of workers' militancy opens up the possibility of more effective intervention by revolutionaries. In the long run willingness to fight and determination in the fight will prove inadequate to workers as a way of defending themselves unless these are accompanied by an awareness of how high the stakes really are. Sooner or later the fragile social peace which still holds in Europe will have to be broken. More than anything else, this is what our rulers are afraid of because when this happens the trade unions will no longer be able to make deals with the police to prevent confrontations with the state (See the articles on the French steelworkers and the miners' strike in this issue.) The myth that workers have the same interests as the ruling class will be shattered. Then the way will be wide open for the working class to turn to the revolutionary alternative and the class struggle can be fought for what is really at stake - to determine which of the opposing classes is going to hold power.

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France : Workers Struggles against Socialist lay-offs

A comrade in France analyses the context and significance of the recent steelworkers' strike.

In October 1981, only a few months after becoming President of the Republic, Mitterand made an official visit to Longwy where he declared: "The steel industry will not be a condemned sector, steel will be safeguarded and developed even if at the cost of great effort".

It wasn't very long before the steelworkers were able to judge for themselves the real value of such enthusiastic declarations from the head of state. When the government announced its plan for steel in March too many workers remembered the struggles of 1979 for there to be any real chance of pacifying workers whose tempers were already frayed by the general decline in their living and working conditions. At Longwy, at Vireux-Molhain (in the Ardennes), at Fos-sur-Mer (near Marseille), where the axe fell unmercifully (25,000 out of 90,000 employees must go by 1987), the workers' reaction was immediate and violent. How could it be otherwise? Take a town like Longwy, for example. In 1979 12,000 were employed in the steel industry, 5,900 by the end of 1983, and if the steel plan goes ahead there would only be 3,000 left.

The steelworkers' anger was thus in direct proportion to the number of false promises which had previously lulled them into passivity. With their violent eruption onto the social scene they fought so that "steel would continue to flow" in Lorraine and elsewhere. (Or at least this is what the unions and the media joined in common chorus to make the aim of the struggle.) The workers responded by pointing an accusing finger at the government, at its policy which is throwing the full weight of capitalism's economic crisis onto the working class. The steel plan was part of a barrage of blows which have reigned down on the working class over the past few months. Car workers (Talbot-Poissy), shipyard workers (Dunkerque), miners - to cite only the most important. The Left government felt the wind of the approaching storm and Fabius, the normally pale Minister of Industry, paled even further at the Council of Ministers' meeting on 29th March when he realised the steelworkers' response.

In fact, our leaders of the Left have been losing their appeal for some time. The confident poses of a Mauroy no longer pay off and at his last press conference Mitterand was unable to hide his worry - a worry which is well-founded. The clouds are still gathering and this time we have reached a stage where it's not only steelworkers (as in 1979) who are the victims of government decisions, but every section of the working class - public sector workers just as much as private, the unemployed, pensioners, all without distinction are called on to contribute to the great "national effort" to put the economy to right. Hardly had the details of the steel plan been officially announced, with the repercussions which are well known, then it was the car workers' turn. Citroen has to get rid of 3,500 employees, Fiat 1,500. The tyre industry has just announced its lay-offs: Michelin has to reduce manpower levels by 3,900 jobs, Dunlop by 3,000. Tens of thousands of building workers' jobs are threatened and similar cuts are imminent in shipbuilding and coalmining. Each month thousands more workers are thrown onto the street (during the last 2 months there has been a spectacular rise in unemployment) while inflation continues to eat away at workers' purchasing power. It's against this threatening background for the ruling class that the steelworkers struggles developed.

Their struggles are an example to us in that they have openly broken the social peace which the Left parties and their trade union accomplices, faithful servants of capitalism that they are, have been trying to maintain. Faced with the steelworkers' anger they have had to act cautiously in order to remain masters of the situation without losing credibility. Thus we have seen the manoeuvres of politicians and the unions during the last few weeks.

In order to save face, there have been stirrings inside the parties in office. Some Socialist Party deputies from Lorraine have "disassociated" themselves from their party, sometimes going so far as "provisionally"

resigning in protest at the government's policies. The Communist Party has also adopted a "firm" stance, and with its usual cries about the "bosses" and the Right-wing's responsibility for the damage done to the national economy, it has declared that it shares "the emotional reaction and anger" of the workers. But we can be quickly reassured that this is no more than a disgusting charade, for the PCF (French Communist Party) no more supports the working class than does the Socialist Party. All of them simply see the gravity of the situation and are agreed on the need to divert the struggle until the unions have imposed calm. Besides, Marchais dispelled all doubt about this in a speech on 26th April when he referred to the Communist Party's behaviour and said,

"We don't want to do anything to weaken the Left ... we will never make such an important gift to our adversaries, to our only adversaries, the RPR and the UDF" (i.e. the Right-wing parties)

There is no doubt that the unions have worked hard to take the heat out of the struggle and have actively discouraged workers in order to ensure a "return to normal". All of them said they were against the steel plan (Krasucki of the CGT found it "unacceptable") but all did their best to ensure that the workers' fightback ended up under the control of the interests of French capital, that is, to ensure that they ended in defeat. First of all they isolated the struggles at a local level. (We will defend ourselves site by site", announced A. Sainjon, Union Secretary of the CGT metalworkers' union.) This allowed the workers to give free reign to their anger in spectacular, but often useless ways from the point of view of strengthening the struggle. At Longwy, when the workers spoke of going to get their guns, the unions asked the police to move outside the town so as to avoid any confrontation. While the CGT was shouting "We'll make the State give in" it was hastening to intervene and protect the Communist-controlled town hall which the steelworkers wanted to burn down. After restricting workers' violence to a tolerable level for the bourgeois state it only remained for the unions to oversee the funeral of the struggle. On 4th April they called for a token 24 hour strike in Lorraine only. This was followed by a steelworkers' demonstration in Paris on 13th April of a similar token kind. After the ploy of limiting the struggle in space came the ploy of limiting it in time.

But, outside of such manoeuvres and despite the precarious calm which has returned to the steel towns, the reasons for the workers' discontent remain and can only be stimulated by the development of the crisis. The steelworkers have shown their willingness to struggle which must inspire other sectors of the working class because the one possibility of a better future for the whole class does not lie in the passive acceptance of sacrifices demanded by the bourgeoisie, but in resolute struggle AGAINST them. Such a struggle can only be developed so long as the working class refuses to allow itself to be diverted from its own class terrain by trade union organisations which accept the economic imperatives of capitalism in crisis (especially the need to restructure the productive apparatus in the face of competition); which are concerned about the economic future of "their region" or "their country"; and whose only desire is that the French steel industry is strong and competitive - little matter that it is workers in other countries who must suffer.

A first condition for the development of independent working class political action will be the capacity for revolutionaries to elaborate a tactic of intervention and then put it into practice. This tactic will be based on the irreconcilable opposition between the interests of the proletariat and those of the bourgeoisie. Such a tactic will allow a breach to be opened up against the disastrous reactionary influence of the unions and will permit the now dispersed working class to solidarise together in a single struggle against capitalism and its crisis, culminating in the violent overthrow of bourgeois institutions and the establishment of proletarian power.

Class Consciousness and Councilist Confusions

or "Who will educate the ICC?"

SOME BASIC POINTS OF ORIENTATION

The issue of class consciousness, as we noted in Revolutionary Perspectives 21[1] is the central issue of revolutionary politics. From ideas about how consciousness develops in the working class, flow an organisation's conceptions about its own role, its relationship with the class as a whole, the tactical means it employs for intervention, and many other issues. Erroneous views on this question are the main stumbling block to a maturation of the weak forces which today constitute "the communist milieu". It is towards combatting such views that our organisation, in its press and public meetings, is addressing itself.

As Marxists, the starting point for all discussions on class consciousness is Marx's unambiguous statement in the German Ideology that, "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force in society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force." However, despite being ideologically dominated by the bourgeoisie, in the real world the working class is an exploited class and is forced to struggle against its exploiters in order to survive. In this fight it is forced to challenge ruling class ideas (and legality) and to unite as a class against bourgeois ideas of society being composed of autonomous individuals. Historically it is this collective struggle which has led the proletariat to organise and define itself as a class within bourgeois society. This recognition of belonging to the same class we call class identity, or class instinct. Lenin called it "trade union consciousness" and Marx called it the creation of the "class-in-itself". But at this level of economic struggle the working class remains within the framework of the capitalist system, struggling against capitalist exploitation, but unable to end it by overthrowing capitalist class rule; coming up against bourgeois ideology, but unable to spontaneously generate a fully-fledged communist consciousness, even though its daily struggle gives rise to what Lenin described as "sparks of consciousness". If the class did not define itself, create its basic class identity through struggle, the very existence of revolutionary minorities would be impossible. It is the existence of the class struggle that creates the conditions for the emergence of revolutionary minorities. But conditions are not causes.

The economic struggle of itself, whether in its day to day aspect, or in the wider moments of pitched battle, does not directly generate a communist consciousness in the proletariat, though it is a pre-condition for it. The evidence is there in 200 years of proletarian history, encompassing the widest and bitterest of class battles. Were these sufficient in themselves, the requisite communist consciousness would have emerged and the revolution come and gone some time ago. Fragmented glimmerings of insight, sparks of consciousness, are certainly generated in the heat of battles, but they are lost unless they take on an organisational-political form. An understanding of the role of the working class in history (the basis of communist consciousness) can only come from an overall awareness of the experience of the working class movement, raised from empiricism to science by placing it within the context of an understanding of the logic of capitalism's development. The individual proletarian, or wider layers of workers as agents of immediate struggle, do not have and cannot achieve communist consciousness simply through their experience as workers. "The proletariat is imprisoned by its immediacy" (Lukacs), though this immediacy is part of the raw material of the communist programme. A qualitative transformation of this immediacy is necessary and this process can only be carried out by "those who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole." (Communist Manifesto)

The forging of communist consciousness is the task of revolutionary minorities, who owe their existence to, and whose raw material is, the class struggle in its widest and

historical sense. These minorities are scientific as well as partisan - understanding the bourgeois economy does not, for example, flow automatically from identification with the cause of the proletariat. Communist minorities take on a revolutionary role once they organise to "restore" this material to the working class. The revolutionary organisation is in the full sense of the word a class party - i.e. an organised leadership to point the class as a whole, through its interventions, perspectives and prescriptions, towards its historic goals in struggle. The development of the class struggle to an intense level poses the contradiction between material reality and bourgeois ideology and allows for the adoption of the strategy and tactics of the communist vanguard by the most advanced elements of the proletariat. Strategy and tactics are not static affairs, fixed for all time. Our strategy is defined by the communist programme, itself defined by the historical lessons of the international class struggle, while tactics are constantly tested and corrected in the light of the evolution of events. The class thus reappropriates its own past and creates its future through making the communist programme of the party its own. In so doing it advances beyond the class identity which, though a necessary step towards communist consciousness, is incapable of leading it beyond the confines of bourgeois society.

Thus we draw a fundamental distinction between the class identity of the workers, which emerges through its economic class fight with the bosses, and communist consciousness, which is forged by the class party. The dialectical interaction of these two elements is the key to revolutionary politics and to the transformation of society from capitalism to communism. So far in history this has been accomplished only by the Bolsheviks in 1917: but failure to recognise that this is our fundamental task leads only to a group being an irrelevance or a hindrance to the class struggle.

In a couple of recent issues of its paper (World Revolution 69 & 70) the International Communist Current (ICC) in Britain has been attacking the fundamental statement of the Marxist view on class consciousness, elaborated in Revolutionary Perspectives 21, describing it as "bourgeois". The bandying about of such anathema is itself testimony to the degeneration of the ICC's critique to the level of slanders. Thus their jibe about "wondering whether a university degree is the minimum qualification" (WR 69 p.6) for the attainment of communist consciousness is simply an evasion of argument and ignores the question of how the proletariat as a class reaches an understanding of the communist programme.

Despite the famous beatings about the bush and the general paucity of argument in their texts (for the ICC an assertion is equivalent to a proof, especially if repeated - their favourite being that the proletariat can achieve communist consciousness because it "has to" and it "must"), the ICC has finally been forced into a corner by the CWO's exposition of the issue and all possible grounds for misunderstanding of their position have been removed. We have clearly stated our views on the issues of class identity and communist consciousness and the ICC has been forced either to agree, and to accept our views, or to come clean, reject them, and align themselves (whatever tactical disavowals they made), with the councilists and spontaneists. In WR 69 (p.7) they tell us that "the self-awareness of the proletariat is necessarily a revolutionary communist consciousness". And if this were not clear enough, they add the astonishing statement that "the most essential communist positions ... are no more than extrapolations from this basic awareness". Thus, for the ICC there is no difference between the class arriving at the awareness of itself as a distinct class in capitalist society, unified through struggle, and revolutionary communist consciousness, which is "no more than an extrapolation" from this.

At the recent London public meeting, one of the ICC members went a step further than this and insisted that not only communist

consciousness, but communism already existed in the social relations of the working class. This utopian and anti-Marxist viewpoint is fully elaborated in WR 70:

"this higher fusion of theory and practice - which will be the hallmark of ... communism, is already prefigured in the proletariat, which in its collective labour, (and) its collective struggle, has no choice but to theorise its practice and practise its theory."

Stripped of its Hegelian mumbo-jumbo, this amounts to arguing that the labour process and class struggle of themselves produce, not only communist consciousness but proto-communist social relations. This is perhaps syndicalism, perhaps sophisticated councilism, but it is not Marxism.

The ICC, showing the main hallmark of a confusionist organisation, thus never faces up to the implications of the high-sounding vagaries it preaches, never draws its ideas out to their logical conclusions, but constantly spreads smokescreens to enable it to hold fundamentally incompatible positions. Thus, despite their argument that the class struggle generates communist consciousness and social relations spontaneously, they still talk of the "need" for a party - a "need" they have theoretically liquidated. But, like everything else, this is produced by the class struggle and "the class furnishes itself with a party in order to unify and develop its consciousness" (WR 69 p.7). Now, either this means that the party is produced by "class struggle", defined so widely as to mean the historical and contemporary class struggle, or it means it is produced directly by the class' economic fight. The first is so vague as to be useless in concretising the class-party relationship; the latter is simply spontaneism. Neither is a contribution to the clarification of the real tasks of the epoch. It is the need to develop and unify the consciousness of the class that leads to the creation of the party by the communist minority, whose creation is not a direct product of the class struggle. This whole dimension is simply blurred over in the ICC's vague, spontaneist scenario.

WHITHER THE ICC?

The CWO has a very clear answer to the problem of why it exists: not so the ICC. Without a clear answer to the party/class problem they are incapable of facing up to the reason for their existence and activity, and are forced to develop an unreal life, revolving around nominalist and scholastic debates. For its members the ICC has become a retreat from the world, a chiliastic brethren, unable to play a concrete political role. The function of the ICC's internal theoretical debates are thus to rationalise its inertia. The CWO has argued that the course of history can only be comprehended dialectically as one heading towards both war and revolution. Revolutionaries must, as the Falklands and Iran-Iraq wars, among others, show, concretise their revolutionary defeatist positions. Not so for the ICC: they have an unreal debate which concludes that the trend of history is unilinearly towards revolution, and a whole area of concern for revolutionaries, i.e. war, is simply spirited away!

The CWO also argued that, though the proletarian revolution cannot succeed in any country taken in isolation, the early outbreaks of the working class could come from the semi-developed countries just as from the advanced ones, and that communists should prepare for both possibilities. The ICC, after being totally unable to answer our charge that they have no perspective for the emergence of a communist vanguard in the peripheral areas, have now spirited away this problem as well! With the same undialectical fervour, they insist that the proletarian revolution must start in Western Europe, and thus another problem - the building of a peripheral vanguard - is spirited away.

Their "left in opposition" debate is another example of their monastic unreality. The main issue is not their anti-Marxist postulates of a conscious, machiavellian bourgeoisie which constantly prevents the proletariat's embryonic communist consciousness from expressing itself. Rather, the issue is the

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THE CRISIS OF FINANCE CAPITAL

On 10th June the economic summit of the 7 most powerful Western nations had a lot of problems on its agenda. This year already we have seen food riots in Tunisia, Morocco, Brazil, the Dominican Republic in which hundreds have been killed (indeed, in Sao Paulo in Brazil food shops are looted every night since a kilo of beans [the staple food] costs 5% of the monthly wage of the average Brazilian worker). Workers in places like Brazil or Bolivia cannot always name the President of their 'own' country but they can tell you that the IMF is their number one enemy. And insofar as the IMF represents the finance capital of international imperialism they are right.

This is why the ruling classes in Latin America, trembling at the prospect of further social convulsions, are screaming warnings to the international banking institutions (both private and governmental) that they cannot pay the increasingly high interest rates being imposed. Already Mexico, Brazil and Argentina are technically bankrupt and have only been saved from being officially declared so by the US government's realisation that if they default on their debts (which, together with those of Colombia, amount to the colossal total of \$2,240 billion) then the US banking structure would collapse as well. Already Ecuador and Bolivia have suspended all payments on their debts and already the Dominican Republic has rejected an IMF loan because imposing its terms has caused riots. And already the tenth largest US bank, the Continental Illinois, has had to be propped up by the US Federal Reserve (the government bank) whilst the fourth largest, Manufacturers Hanover, is thought to be in need of more help than Continental Illinois (which got \$7.3 billion). What these banks have in common is massive lending to Latin America. In fact it is now calculated that US banks have loaned out to Latin America a sum four times greater than their capital. Meanwhile the problem of repaying debts for the so-called less developed countries (i.e. those completely dominated by imperialism) has recently increased with the rise in US interest rates by 1½%. This at a stroke added \$5 billion to the debts of Latin American countries alone.

THE INTEREST OF US IMPERIALISM

And once we get to US interest rates we are nearer to the roots of the problems of the peripheral countries who are dominated by world imperialism. Capitalist politicians in Western Europe often refer to the US economy as the "locomotive" which will pull the world out of depression. In a limited sense this has been true. The US has enjoyed economic expansion and the high price of the dollar has enabled European products to be sold in the USA in greater numbers than ever before. However, this small counter-effect is the only advantage which US imperialism has allowed to the rest of the globe. For the rest it has sucked in surplus value from everywhere in the world in the form of cheap commodities and capital. In short, the US boom is based on the increasing misery of the peripheral areas and the stagnation of West European capitalism. How has it done it?

In the first place Reagan came to power announcing that taxes would be cut and as a consequence government spending would have to be cut. Thus Reagan was in the monetarist mainstream as long as it involved cutting welfare benefits and generally attacking the working class (unemployment initially rose). But when it came to the increasing confrontation on a global level with Russian imperialism Reagan raised defence spending to new heights in order to develop and deploy new weapons (Cruise, MX), re-equip the US fleet and pay for intervention in Central America, Lebanon, the Gulf and Grenada. Raising defence spending without raising taxes has led to a record budget deficit in the US. This in turn has led to high interest rates as the government has had to borrow to continue its

spending programme. Instead of this harming the US economy it has set in motion a series of tendencies which benefit it. High interest rates attract foreign capital and goods to the US as well as sales of the dollar which has artificially risen in value. The rise in the world value of the dollar has kept the prices of imported commodities low and so inflation in the US remains low,

"As a consequence the US enjoys the best of all possible worlds: strong economic growth combined with low inflation and a budget deficit financed by the influx of foreign goods and foreign capital." (Financial Times 23.5.84)

The bourgeoisie empirically knows that the mounting pile of debt will eventually cause a total collapse since it can remember what happened in 1929 when Wall Street crashed. Today the main citadel of finance capital is not the stock market but the international banking conglomerates. This is why the bourgeois economists are issuing warnings to the banks even in the middle of a "banking boom" (when bank dividends are 10%).

"The US economic recovery made banking a highly lucrative business last year ... (but) It would still take the repudiation of only half of Latin America's debt to wipe out most of the big US banks." (Financial Times 2.4.84)

and:

"The US budget deficit is the last remaining engine of inflation in the world; if it is reduced deflationary forces will predominate and the world economy is going to crash. The heavily indebted countries will be unwilling and unable to pay their debts ..." (Financial Times 23.5.84)

THE MARXIST EXPLANATION

Whilst bourgeois theory only reacts with panic-stricken empiricism "the analysis of the real relations" in this crisis validates the Marxist theory of imperialism. Imperialism is not a distinct mode of production from capitalism, nor is it simply the military or overseas "policy" of capitalists. Imperialism is the logical development of tendencies which capitalism has always contained. It is "the highest stage of capitalism" (Lenin). Right from the beginning Marx noted the nature of capitalist competition in which,

"expropriation is brought about by the immanent laws of capitalist production, by the centralisation of capital. One capitalist lays a number of fellow capitalists low." (Capital Vol. 1 p.845-6)

This came about due to the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall which Marx called "the most important law for modern political economy" (Grundrisse p.748). Put simply, capitalists attempt to lower the value of the commodities they produce by increasing the productivity of labour (i.e. introducing more advanced machinery, using the cheapest raw materials and keeping labour costs down). Those able to do this first are able to lower prices and undersell their competitors and thus precipitate them into bankruptcy. Bankruptcies led to falls in demand and increasingly international slumps throughout the 19th century. After each slump the cycle of accumulation could begin again since the value of commodities had been reduced and fewer firms were left to carry on producing and competing together. It was this process that Marx called "the centralisation of capital".

And even at this early stage the search to cheapen the elements of production sent capital out of the main capitalist centres (mainly Britain) in search of raw materials, cheap labour and wider markets. Because other countries at this time had:

"lesser facilities of production ... an advanced country is enabled to sell its goods above their value even when it sells them cheaper than the competing countries." (Capital Vol. 3 p.238)

Thus centralisation of capital which gave rise in the late 19th century to cartels, trusts and monopolies, was always accompanied by the export of capital. At this time it was "not the impossibility of doing business at home but the race for higher profits" which was "the motive power of world capitalism" (Imperialism and World Economy Bukharin p.84). Nor did the centralisation of capital stop at trusts and monopolies. By the early years of the century industrial investment required such vast sums of capital that industrial capital had become mortgaged to the banks,

"An increasingly large section of industrial capital does not belong to the industrialists who apply it. The right to manipulate the capital is obtained by them only through the banks ..." (Finance Capital Hilferding)

This has naturally given these banking and industrial conglomerates enormous economic and political power. With their capacity to concentrate more capital than most national budgets they are able to shift capital around to such an extent that they can evade tariff barriers, exploit the cheapest labour and raw materials, as well as fix prices in order to gain what Marx called an "extra-profit". Today we have seen the full logic of this in the way in which "aid" has been thrust on the peripheral areas at floating interest rates which continuously raise the payments of these governments and have brought them to all intents and purposes to bankruptcy. Today 2% of the firms of the industrialised West control 80% of the world market but the vast bulk of productive investment is in the hands of the world's leading banks. Hardly any of the economic activity of the peripheral countries is outside these banks which, as one observer noted, "suck in profits like a vacuum cleaner". With weak domestic markets and a generally lower organic composition of capital these areas have no economic means with which to defend themselves and the extra-profits flow untaunted to the West.

However, centralisation, extra-profits and greater control of the economic activity of the world do not do away with the cyclical crisis caused by the falling rate of profit. Indeed, it means that when the cycle closes the crisis takes on a more acute form. In the 19th century when capitalism entered its periodic crises the cycle of accumulation could proceed again after a few bankruptcies had lowered the value of existing capital (and thus raised the rate of profit) but in the 20th century the centralisation of capital is so developed that devaluation in this way is insufficient and economic crises tend to be longer and, because they involve competing national capitals, create military tensions which eventually burst out in world wars. These wars are not the simple cabinet wars of earlier centuries but bitter wars to the death in which capital is devalued on an enormous scale by destruction and over use. After such wars, like those of 1914-18 and 1939-45, the cycle of accumulation could begin again, leading to a new boom in which, according to bourgeois commentators, capitalism had once again confounded Marxism. But the events of the last few years have once again proved "the value" of Marxism. As we said earlier, the bourgeoisie learns in a purely empirical way (e.g. its generals are always fighting the last war rather than the one in which they are engaged). It is the same with economics.

THE END OF THE THIRD CYCLE?

Not recognising that "the monetary crisis simply reflects problems in capitalist production caused by the falling rate of profit and which cannot be overcome by changes in monetary arrangements" ("Money, Credit and Crisis" in Revolutionary Perspectives 8) the Western bourgeoisie[1] got together after World War Two at Bretton Woods to agree on fixed currency exchange rates. But when the cycle of accumulation began to break down after

the boom years of the Fifties and Sixties industrial profits began to fall. After 1965 the USA resorted to printing money to stimulate an artificial boom but when, in 1972, foreign banks demanded that the dollars they had bought be converted into gold (at the agreed Bretton Woods rate) because the USA was holding devalued dollars it was forced to renounce the Bretton Woods agreement. Since then there has been chaos in the international money markets as a result of finance capitalism's speculative methods in appropriating surplus value produced in other areas as extra-profits for its own needs.[2] The Reagan "mini-boom" is the latest version of this appropriation. At the economic summit in London the other 6 Western leaders tried to persuade Reagan to reduce US interest rates without immediate success (even if he wanted to, he cannot change his policy before the November election without committing political suicide) but they are only trying to treat the symptoms of a disease whose causes they do not understand. As Marx pointed out in Capital Vol.3,

"If we observe the cycles in which modern industry moves ... we shall find that a low rate of interest generally corresponds to periods of prosperity and extra-profit, a rise in interest rates separates prosperity and its reverse ... a maximum rate of interest ... corresponds to a period of crisis." (p.360)

Having established that capitalism is at the end of its third cycle of accumulation this century we now have to answer the question

of what perspective this opens up. Though the bourgeoisie does not understand the real cause of the crisis the policy it adopts will govern the speed of its development. As we wrote in our Perspectives text in RP 21:

"It is impossible to predict how long the existing financial institutions established by imperialism after the 2nd World War can continue to bail out bankrupt states. What is certain is that, with a dwindling world stock of surplus value, they cannot do so indefinitely. The prospect of one or more debtor states being officially declared bankrupt and descending into economic chaos is now a real possibility."

If the present US government policy continues such a collapse is naturally going to occur more rapidly. Not only has the Reagan administration squeezed up interest rates but it has cut capital available for the IMF's low interest bank, the International Development Agency. For the peripheral areas of the world economy there is no way out. With IMF and other sources of international "aid" come stipulations for further austerity; without such "aid" their populations face starvation, unemployment and unbelievably high inflation, just the same. In such circumstances the misery of the workers of the periphery can be expected to produce social convulsions which will make previous riots appear mere frolics.

It is more likely, however, that after November the US will introduce a policy of internal deflation (tax increases, cuts in military spending) and recent efforts by Reagan

to take the heat out of imperialist antagonisms (e.g. at the June summit the West renounced "force" as a means of solving international problems) indicate some preparations for this. At the same time plans are already being drawn up for new low fixed interest rate loans to stave off the bankruptcy of the periphery. Thus, assuming no "accidents" like a victory for the guerrillas in El Salvador which would increase defence spending and revive the threat of global bankruptcy, this policy could prolong the crisis. What it won't do is solve it. But it will give the proletarian minorities around the world an opportunity to emerge, clarify their programme, strengthen their numbers and centralise their activity before imperialism attempts to impose its final solution of a third world war.

[1] The Eastern bourgeoisie also has a form of finance capital in its loans to the peripheral areas (See WV 15 "Cuba: Pawn of Imperialism"). The reason it doesn't enter into this article is not because Eastern Europe is socialist but rather because the Iron Curtain is as much an economic as a military barrier. With non-convertible currencies, the Russian imperialist bloc cannot be destroyed by the cheap commodities and loans of the West in the way peripheral areas of capitalism are. Detente was a Western policy, which tried to get behind those barriers by increasing the volume of East-West trade.

[2] See Communist Review 1 (just out), "Crisis and Imperialism".

Bolivia — Whether Dictatorship or Democracy The Working Class pays for the Capitalist Crisis

In October 1982, after 18 years of military rule, "free" elections were held in Bolivia. They gave a majority to the civilian coalition of the PUDEP, mainly made up of Christian Democrats, Socialists and Communists, and thus inaugurated, according to local propaganda, a new period in the history of a country which has seen no less than 189 military coups in just 160 years of its "independent" development. At the time, it was generally explained that a return to democracy would be the solution which would drag the country out of the disastrous economic situation in which it was enmeshed. It would be a means of restoring confidence in the government and of fighting bribery, raised by the military to the level of an institution. The former government of General Garcia Meza (and the other military dictators before him) were unilaterally accused of having led Bolivia to the brink of economic ruin through their incompetence and selfishness. The new government, led by President Siles Suazo, the so-called hero of the 1952 "anti-feudal revolution", supported by the COB (Bolivian trade union) would take a different path and write a memorable page in the history of Bolivia. Or so the story went.

The left government is certainly getting into the record books, but precisely in the opposite way it intended. The Bolivian working masses who had suffered brutal repression under the regimes of Colonel Natush Bush and General Meza and who held out hope for a better future in the new democracy have seen their illusions shattered in the space of a few months. The economic situation of Bolivia has been worsening steadily to the point where inflation is now 5.6% a day. This simply means that the Bolivian miners, for instance, who had struck in last February for a 57% wage increase have seen the "gains" of their struggle eaten up in just 10 days. And since then inflation has been growing apace, destroying purchasing power. Starvation is now spreading throughout the country, particularly in the Altiplano region where tens of thousands of Indian peasants are living in appalling conditions, most of them trying now to move to the capital, La Paz, in the hope of escaping death in the mountains. But even there they can't get the basic necessities of life. Speculation and the black market are rife. Bread, rice or oil are often sold at prices far above the official one. To contain discontent, the "democratic" government has been forced to carry on a policy of state subsidy for basic foodstuffs, but given the level of corruption at all levels in the administration, this has no effect on prices.

The crisis of capitalism on a world scale has found in Bolivia specific conditions which

have greatly accelerated its development. Since it freed itself from Spanish domination in 1825 Bolivia has just been a hunting ground for international capitalism, mainly US, in search of cheap raw materials and a labour force to serve its own interests. The development of the country has thus been conditioned by the needs of foreign capital and for years the mining industry has formed the backbone of the Bolivian economy. The exploitation of other natural resources, like oil and gas at the end of the 60's, has also been conditioned by the parasitic activities of US capital. In the agricultural sector the United Fruit Company has been able to wrap tentacles round the major part of production and draws substantial profits from it, to the detriment of the real needs of the majority of the local population. The local ruling class, closely linked to the interests of its imperialist master from whom it received financial and military aid, has developed a huge administrative apparatus which has been a further drain on the economic infrastructure. The first onslaughts of the capitalist crisis have found Bolivia with a stagnant economy and lacking the competitiveness required to keep afloat without growing indebtedness.

Like everywhere else in the world, the reaction of the Bolivian ruling class has been to increase pressure on the working population whose commitment to fighting the deterioration in its living conditions hasn't been destroyed by the ruthless repression suffered in the last decade.

Over the last 17 months no less than 500 strikes have taken place throughout the country, some of them leading to the erection of barricades in working class areas. But all these actions of protest have met the big stick of the ruling left and the deliberate sabotage of their union allies in the COB. In control of the whole public sector workforce (70% of the economy) and of the rural one, the COB has seen to it that the explosions of working class discontent could not go beyond limits acceptable to the interests of the national capital. In order to "save democracy" striking workers have been told to go back to work or else have been carefully led to defeat through useless and passive hunger marches in which the COB has skilfully wielded the old weapon of nationalism, blaming the USA for the spread of famine and the failure of the "democratic" experiment in Bolivia.

A COB member, Noel Vasquez, saying that persistent unrest would inevitably lead to a reform of the military, argued that "understanding" was needed and he further added: "We are ready to cooperate in the rescue operation of our country". Most of the COB leaders are now convinced that the policy of state

subsidies for basic foodstuffs must be abandoned in favour of one of "real" prices: "Democracy is certainly worth such a drastic revision of policy!"

It is along these lines that union delegates have addressed striking miners of Huanuni who met in a general assembly last April. Whilst workers were ready for unlimited strike action, local COB representatives, saying that they "understood" the situation of the miners, warned them against the dangers of "going too far". In short, the same COB union which had patiently built itself a false image as a martyred organisation of the working class under military rule, has now thrown off its mask and is actively playing the same role as its counterparts the world over: the role of defending the austerity policy the bourgeoisie is introducing in order to preserve its crisis-ridden system of exploitation. By containing the workers' struggles and asking them to sacrifice their own interests (i.e. to give up an intransigent defence of their living conditions) so as to save "democracy" (that fig leaf of capitalist rule) the COB is trying to make workers solidarise with their own exploiters.

The needs of the proletariat cannot be subordinated to those of the bourgeoisie. Any organisation which advocates "understanding" between classes facing each other in a historic confrontation, simply operates for the survival of a system which offers famine and misery today as a prelude to war tomorrow.

Despite an unflinching determination to fight, whatever the circumstances, the Bolivian masses have been easy prey to the manoeuvres of those bourgeois elements, whether inside or outside the COB (especially the remnants of the guerrilla movement of the 60's influenced by Guevarism) which endeavour to promote the interests of the rival imperialist bloc. Portraying themselves as friends of the workers, they are building a new capitalist jail within which to contain the spontaneous outbursts of working class discontent. In Bolivia, as elsewhere, political independence is needed to avoid militant struggles being led into dead-ends. Drawing a clear line between working class interests and the interests of the ruling class will be the first task of the most advanced elements of the Bolivian proletariat. Firmly grounded on the programme of emancipation of the world working class and led by a clear revolutionary vanguard, the exemplary militancy of the Bolivian workers will be able to overcome their present weaknesses and bring their own contribution to the overthrow of a system which, whether in military or democratic disguise, feeds on their blood and sweat.

Continued from page 3

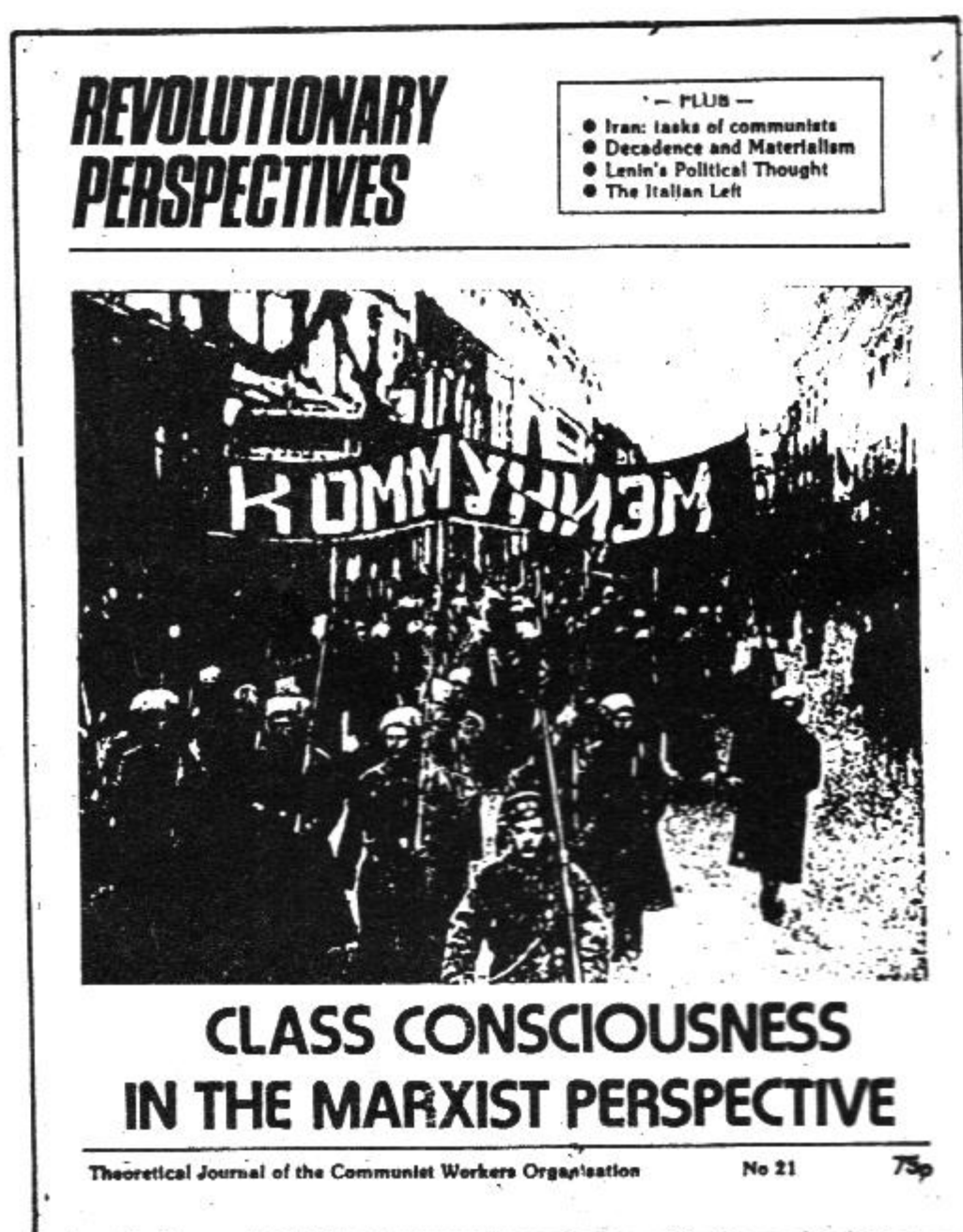
unreality of the "debate", since it has no implications at all for the ICC's practice. Whether the left is in or out of power (formerly the ICC spent volumes trying to prove it had to be in, no...the same effort goes to prove the contrary), the ICC's practice remains exactly the same. The debate, therefore, is pure scholasticism, like all the others, giving an illusion of clarification and deflecting the organisation's attention from the real issues of revolutionary politics. We are not saying that some of these issues, so dear to the ICC, are not worth debating. What we say is that the debate must be in the context of analysing the concrete tasks of the revolutionary party, and not as an evasion of these tasks, or as substitutes for them.

Under the attacks of the CWO, the ICC has been forced to tactically mend its fences. A plethora of criticisms of councilism have recently appeared as a kind of backhanded refutation of the view that the ICC is councilist. But however much they may quibble over details, the ICC clearly occupies the same common ground as councilism, which is the organisational heritage of the German Left.[2] This is reflected in the gentle chiding they reserve for the most reactionary anarchist and councilist groupings. One such, which recently published a pamphlet The Bourgeois Role of Bolshevism is described as "within the proletarian milieu" (WR 70 p7). No "bourgeois" tag for those "comrades". It is difficult to see any real signs of hope in the obtuse outpourings of this organisation on the party/class question. Its dogmatically reiterated errors appear to bear all the hallmarks of a terminal disease.

Footnotes to the article

[1] See the text "Class Consciousness in the Marxist Perspective" in Revolutionary Perspectives 21, available at £1 post paid from the group address.

[2] For a critique of this heritage see "The KAPD and the Question of the Party: A Contribution" in Revolutionary Perspectives 18.



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The CWO publishes 2 theoretical journals as well as this paper. Our major limitation on more frequent publication is finance so we are asking all readers and sympathisers to enable us to expand the frequency and quality of our publications.

Communist Intervention in Italy

CWO INTRODUCTION

Like his "Socialist" colleague in France, Craxi the recently elected Italian Prime Minister, is showing whose interests he really stands for as he tries to handle the effects of the economic crisis in Italy. The central issue of the class struggle in Italy is that of the "scala mobile" - the system where wages are linked to the rate of inflation. Over the past few years the various coalition governments have tried to abolish this system without complete success. It is now the turn of Craxi's "socialists" to get workers to accept what previous governments couldn't - the virtual end of the scala mobile. How far governments have been able to alter the terms of the wages linked scheme has been determined by how far the class has demonstrated its will to resist: the state of the scala mobile is a guide to the balance of class forces.

This is the general background to the 24 hour strike of a few railway workers in Milan which is described here. A million workers demonstrating in Rome (as they did on March 23rd) is an impressive event by comparison with the strike described here. But the significance of the Milan rail junction workers strike lies not in its numbers but in the fact that it was called for by revolutionary communists - members of our fraternal organisation, the Internationalist Communist Party (Battaglia Comunista) - who have organised a small kernel in the railyards.

It may be disquieting, but it is never the less true that we have to face up to the fact that the influence of revolutionary organisations inside the working class as a whole is tiny. In Britain especially, the vast bulk of our agitation and propaganda is conducted from outside the immediate class struggle. Our task though is to develop our presence inside that class struggle to undermine the reactionary influence of the trade unions and self-styled "Socialist" or "Communist" Parties where it is most taken for granted and at its most dangerous - on the factory floor; or in this case - the railway

goods depot.

We are printing this description of a small strike because it shows:

1. How communists can not only influence, but lead the working class fight if they have an established presence in the class. This influence is not something which can be won overnight. It involves patient and painstaking work which doesn't end when any particular struggle or wave of struggle dies down. In the end, however, the results can be far greater than the most flamboyant show of activity from outside.

2. How the trade unions and members of 'left' parties alter their stance in order to maintain their credibility as workers' representatives. For them a strike is only part of their negotiating leverage and even when they favour one they don't allow it to go beyond the framework of union agreements (like the Triple Alliance which has proved its worthlessness to the miners in Britain or the agreement mentioned here between the three Italian union federations). However, they will go along with unofficial action in order to take credit for it later whilst they find ways to bring it back under their control, within the framework of negotiations with the bosses.

3. The reality of what we have been arguing about class consciousness. It doesn't arise evenly or homogeneously but tends to make great leaps forward at times of struggle, only to fall back when the struggle ends. Only a strategy of building anti-union groups in the workplace can keep alive the insights learned in one struggle for the next, as a stage in building a communist party with a real life in the working class. But even the correct strategy is meaningless if, as our comrades say here, it isn't accompanied by consistent and militant application.

Against the Craxi Decree

Although the CISL, UIL (unions) and the PSI (Italian Socialist Party) did their utmost to portray the strikes at the Milan junction as having been instigated and organised by the PCI (Italian Communist Party), the truth is just the opposite. The PCI and the majority wing of the CGIL had taken stock of the situation and in various ways had quickly taken over an initiative taken by the workers themselves.

The news of the Decree on wages was just out but neither the Communist Party delegates nor the cells of the PCI did anything. Our comrades had their work cut out simply getting the first assembly in the Milan Farini station off the ground. They only succeeded in achieving this by gathering, together with the more combative delegates (only one of whom was a PCI member), the signatures of all the workers in the goods traffic sector.

The first workers assembly finally took place on 17th February at Milan Farini. After a lively debate in which many workers took part they voted for a 24 hour strike as a protest against the government decree and the entire policy followed by the unions up till then. This policy meant that wages would be the inevitable victim of the economic crisis and was supported by the Communist Party wing of the CGIL.

Representatives of the 5th Section of Milan's Porto Garibaldi (railway station) and other workers there also took part in the assembly which clearly declared, through the various interventions, its refusal to consider the decree as it stood. This is a natural conclusion to draw from the long-established view that the unions, so long as they are all united, can overcome any obstacle. "Against this suicidal view", as one of our members maintained, "workers must fight today and in the future to take control of their own struggles and to reappropriate their historic destiny. The road of sacrifice and renunciation is no solution to the crisis, and neither is it a remedy to the calamity of unemployment. The only end to the crisis is war, as the history of capitalism demonstrated after the great crisis of 1929".

On this basis the strike was approved

unanimously by the workers of the goods sector and by a huge majority of those in the Rialzo team.

The assembly, moreover, decided not to fix the date of the strike straightaway since there was news that assemblies were being called in other plants and amongst the workers of Milan Central.

A delegation from Milan Farini and Garibaldi had been invited to Milan Central and participated in that assembly to ask for solidarity for their own initiative. Though not all of its positions were the same as the Farini assembly, the Milan Central assembly voted by a large majority for a 24 hour stoppage, to take effect immediately in order to prevent the company having time to block it.

The strike, which took place between 9.00 p.m. on 20th to 9.00 p.m. 21st February, was solidly supported by all the workers of the goods sector of Milan Farini and the great majority of the Garibaldi and Central stations. On the other hand, lower percentages came out from amongst the office personnel in all three places.

The proclamation of the strike produced an immediate reaction from the CISL and UIL who denounced it and broke up the agreement with the CGIL. However, this didn't produce great "despair" amongst the workers. On the contrary, they saw in this the first sign of the decomposition of a corpse capable only of emitting poisonous fumes.

There remains for our comrades the difficult task of clarification and organisation of the more combative vanguard that emerged in this struggle, with the object of preventing them being reabsorbed into the forces of the PCI and the majority of the CGIL. These organisations remain to watch over the struggle without giving it any direction. They are seeking to give themselves prestige and a revarnished image whilst taking over the struggle in which their role was to act as a spanner in the works and where they sought to sell themselves to the highest bidder. Their part in recent events effectively demonstrates how they are willing to sell off the workers "body and soul" in exchange for a few formal modifications to the decree.

The Miners Strike and Communist Intervention

Like all large strike movements at present, the miners' strike has revealed the weakness of revolutionary communist ideas within the working class and the weakness of the forces available to revolutionary communism. In such circumstances it is obviously essential that a revolutionary communist group should evolve a clear strategy which avoids the twin perils of economic tailing of the class and introspective dogmatic abstraction. The CWO was probably as active, if not more so, than any other proletarian group, giving out (at the time of going to press) 7 different leaflets in 7 different coalfields as well as leafletting steel works, docks, power stations, railway goods yards, miners welfare and various rallies and demonstrations. In addition to holding public meetings we also sold a record number of our publications.

However, quantity is not quality and it is only within our overall framework that we could judge our interventions. Stated briefly this is that our leaflets should not simply be abstractions from our Platform, including every aspect of our politics. We have to concretise key issues (like the reactionary nature of the unions) in terms of the real struggle going on before us. Although we called for the extension of the struggle in every leaflet, we are realistic enough to recognise that communists, at present, are in no position to influence it directly. Our task at the moment is to differentiate communist politics from those who simply claim to be communist or socialist. Our aim is to increase the number of communist militants propagandising for communism and organising for revolution in the workplace. We aim to create communist kernels in the workplace. We recognise that it is at times of intense struggle that such kernels have their best chance of emerging. This strategy of building factory or workplace groups is part of a wider perspective of linking the communist party to the class. Without this workers who begin to fight against capitalist politics during struggle will remain without an organisational and political framework to operate within when that struggle subsides. It is only through such groups that the communist programme can be brought again to the working class.

In the light of the above framework we felt that the last 4 leaflets we issued matched up to their tasks but the first 3 did not fully reflect our framework for intervention. The first we felt was a little too general, in that it restated communist politics without having an immediate purpose to those miners and steelworkers who received it. The second and third, whilst being extremely good agitational in their attack on the unions, did not articulate enough the wider context of the strike. However, none of them descended into the positions of the leftists who simply call for "support the struggle", nor did they contain a series of infantile and dogmatic poses which bore no relation to the reality in front of us. Unfortunately these two extremes were not avoided by the spontaneists of Wildcat and the International Communist Current (ICC).

At our public meeting in Manchester we outlined what "victory" in the miners' strike could mean for us and the working class. In the immediate term we argued that an economic victory would only be short-term and that sooner rather than later, the NUM will negotiate away jobs as it has been doing for decades. However, the real content of victory for the miners was in any lessons they learned about how to organise their struggle and how far they became aware that in the end real victory can only come by an independent struggle against capitalism instead of within it. In their various replies, members of the Wildcat group appeared to agree with this and indeed argued that as the CWO and Wildcat "were saying the same thing" we should issue joint leaflets. We found this encouraging but pointed out that whatever individual leaflets might be saying there had to be a common framework of political aims before joint work was possible. As Wildcat reject the necessity for the proletariat to create a party as an instrument of its emancipation any basis for joint intervention was illusory. In the following week the implications of this difference came home when Wildcat issued a leaflet, "Support the Miners - Join the Picket Lines" in which the message was limited to just that. This didn't seem to worry Wildcat

since when we pointed out that SWP leaflets were more political they simply said that they would support the SWP! Wildcat have criticised the idea of factory groups as insulting to the working class ("creating 2nd-class communists") but their solution to their lack of influence in the class was quite simply to tail-end the struggle and leave out any political message altogether. Nevertheless, with a sense of self-importance which dwarfs us "substitutionists", they firmly believed that with a few hundred leaflets and with no clear political framework they could, from outside, influence the direction of a struggle already within the control of the unions and the police. This isn't leadership or acting as a vanguard but the traditional delusion of activists. Its corollary will be demoralisation when the activists themselves realise that their efforts have failed to find the slightest echo and that they have been reduced to not putting forward a single communist position.

But if economism is the end result of incoherent activism, the more abstract spontaneism of the ICC pushed it in practice towards reactionary positions. As the article on class consciousness in this issue shows, the ICC cannot accept that the working class is anything other than a metaphysical, proto-communist unity. The reality that the capitalist crisis creates divisions in the class just as at the same time it tends to unify workers is lost to the ICC. Naturally, since to recognise this fact would mean having to face up to the task of trying to overcome these divisions. At our February public debate one ICCer dismissed our example of the Talbot-Poissy internecine class warfare (See WV 15) as a fiction. Those opposing the fight against redundancies were, he said, "only a few foremen". But the British miners' strike has really brought these cosy notions to grief and in this strike the ICC has actually worked against the interests of the class, unlike in the 1980 steel strike where it was simply an irrelevance.



Bourgeois consciousness inside the working class. Scabs going to work in the 1920s.

During the miners' strike we had the example of 20,000 Notts. miners working on, in the illusion that their jobs and earnings were safe: not a few hypothetical foremen here. The ICC could not accept the reality staring them in the face, since this would have undermined their cherished notions of the class struggle educating and unifying the class automatically. So they denied that these deserters in the class war were scabs at all. ("It can never be a simple question of dismissing fellow workers as scabs ... there are material reasons for their reluctance (to strike)" (WR 70 p.3). But there are always material reasons for "fellow workers", or to give them their real name, scabs, to strike-break, and those who work on while their mates are engaged in struggle deserve no other name.

The ICC implies that the attempt to get Notts. men out was a union-boss manoeuvre to contain the struggle. Possibly the Notts. men are the real communists, refusing to follow a union-led strike? In the early days of the strike it was vital to get the strike-breakers out. The demoralisation caused by their working on as well as the material effect of their output on CEBG stocks demanded this. Generalising the struggle is certainly the key to victory, but to suggest that this excludes trying to strengthen the immediate sector on

strike at the same time, is another of the ICC's false dichotomies.

As well as defending scabbing and contributing to demoralisation, the ICC's advice on the strike was nefarious. Their prescriptions as to what the workers should be doing were so vague as to be adventurist. Not every strike can be the beginning of an "international mass strike, the generalisation of the struggle across national frontiers", as they said in one of their leaflets. An accurate assessment of the balance of class forces and the potential for generalisation guides the tactics of communist intervention - not pious hopes. While offering such grand prescriptions, the ICC on the other hand totally ignores the fact that this was the central most important dispute in Britain for a decade, whose outcome would be decisive for the balance of class forces. Their leaflet spread defeatism as well as adventurism by saying "it is not a question of losing this or that strike". Yet this was not "this or that strike" but, as we said, a struggle that had to be won. The ICC's demoralising message was reinforced by their criticisms of many of the actions which the workers were actually undertaking without offering any concrete demands and tactics themselves. Thus they criticised the attempt to block coal movements during the strike: due to overproduction this "doesn't really hurt the state and the bosses", according to their leaflet. Even if overproduction were the cause of the crisis (which it is not) the ICC's tactics would not follow. Just because there is "too much coal" doesn't mean there is too much in the right places (e.g. steel works cannot maintain the huge stocks of power stations and need daily deliveries). Thus they undermined the actions of the class without contributing anything positive. We should also add that the ICC's overproductionist deductions would mean that NO strike could hurt the bosses, since "too many" commodities are already produced. To sum up, in the miners' strike we have seen the ICC:

- arguing that winning or losing the strike wasn't important;
- undermining the class' attempts to hit the bosses by blocking coal movements;
- preaching adventurist fantasies about international mass strikes;
- defending, along with Thatcher and the police, the right to scab.

The miners' strike has highlighted the barrenness in theory and dangers in practice of spontaneism in the proletarian camp. In front of us there lies a period of intensification of working class struggles, but this will be punctuated by periods of apparent class peace. The work of building an internationalist communist party demands a patient confrontation of the theoretical weaknesses of others who aspire to a revolutionary practice. On our part it demands further efforts to improve the presentation of revolutionary politics to the working class as its hostility to all capitalist forces increases. But above all, it demands a clear revolutionary strategy based on a recognition that the party and communist consciousness are synonymous and that the recruitment of more militants is at present the most concrete step possible towards the emergence of the international party.

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WORKERS VOICE

LESSONS FROM THE MINERS STRIKE

The most significant point about the miners' strike is that it took place at all, thus signalling the end of a long period of class retreat in the face of the attacks of the government and bosses. As the crisis of capitalism deepens, and as the ruling class attempts to rationalise and restructure its capital in a vain effort to restore profitability, many more workers will be added to the 4m already on the dole. In this respect the miners' strike is significant in that it is the first concerted fight against redundancy by any large section of the working class in Britain since the crisis began. Furthermore, whatever the outcome of the strike, the miners will not return to work in a position of abject defeat as happened to the steelworkers in 1980. Their struggle has already given confidence to many other workers to resist further attacks (teachers, dockers, BL workers, and railway workers). It has also provoked some elementary attempts to connect struggles. 200 Birkenhead dustbin men, for example, marched down to Liverpool docks to block coal imports whilst in Lanarkshire steel workers on strike for a pay claim joined picketing miners. It is clear too, from the letters published in the Daily Mirror that the ruling class was impressed into buying off the railway workers, not so much by the militancy of the miners themselves, but because of the solidarity of individual railmen like those who refused to take coal to Ravenscraig or even the isolated individuals like the driver who refused to take his train under a bridge draped with a miners' banner.

POLICE AND PICKETS

And, of course, it only by their militant struggle that the miners have concretely exposed what communists have always argued. That, despite his funny hat, the British "bobby" is part of a well-organised system of repression ready for use when social peace breaks down. The state has spent more on policing this strike already than it did in the entire Falklands campaign. We our-

selves have witnessed all the new techniques used by the police from "snatch squads" to waiting until only a hundred or so miners are left at a rally so that they can practise riot shield charges (not to mention cavalry charges). In this general police mayhem we have even seen school children on their way home truncheoned. But this brings us to a pivotal point of the struggle. With the lessons of the strikes of 1972 and 1974 and the unemployed riots of 1981 fresh in their minds, the ruling class have been able to develop their apparatus of repression (even having army units in reserve) whereas the workers have not found new tactics or new forms of organisation. Furthermore, no large section of the working class as a whole joined with the miners, as they did ten years ago, and in general the number of active participants in the strike has been lower. In 1974 there were 40,000 pickets a day out whilst on some days during this strike less than 1,000 pickets have been spread around Nottinghamshire. This is not unconnected to the fact that the union has cut its subsidies to pickets to 50p a day (in 1974 it was £2.50 plus an overnight allowance). Miners who don't go exactly where the union says don't even get the 50p. However, in general many have waited at home to see what the outcome will be. Even the mass picketing has descended into a ritual shoving of pickets against police. As one miner at Mansfield said, "there has been too much plastic picketing".

FALSE FRIENDS

The biggest handicap to new tactics emerging was the fact that the miners' false friends in the unions and the Labour Party urged the miners to stay within the bounds of legality. Moreover, many miners were conned into believing that the "Triple Alliance" of a few union bureaucrats in the NUM, NUR and ISTC could give real solidarity. Right from the beginning of the strike Bill Sirs said steelworkers wouldn't "sacrifice themselves on someone else's altar" - which was rich coming from someone who had negotiated away thousands of jobs. Fortunately, some steel workers at Clydebridge remembered the elementary claim of class solidarity and struck in any case, but the big strip mills all stayed working. In 1974 the steel works had closed down at the first request and the strike hit the bosses from the start. In general then, the unions' image as working class organisations has not been questioned by workers during this strike. The NUM's role in containing the struggle became more and more open as the strike wore on until by the beginning of June local union leaders and the police could reach an amicable agreement at Orgreave to "avoid incidents". In other words the union openly accepted that the fight was no more than a ritual that could be used to let off steam, but hardly a serious confrontation with the armed representatives of the class enemy.

The hypocrisy of the union leaders has been matched only by the Labour Party which first urged a ballot and only finally started "supporting" the miners at the end of May. This was no accident since Labour's record in regard to the miners is worse than the Tories. From 1964 to 1970 Labour closed one pit a week and in 1977 it was Benn who, as Minister of Energy, introduced the productivity scheme which has made 20,000 Notts. miners feel comfortable enough to stay at work. It was Labour who also used troops rather than

the police to break strikes in 1949 (dockers) and in 1979 (firemen). However, Benn is allowed to pose as a friend of the miners and the confidence trick of Labour as a Party for the workers continues.

Labour's call for a ballot was an attempt to halt the strike in its tracks (and thus not spoil its chances in the local government elections) but it was a union ballot which undermined the impetus of the strike in the crucial first two weeks. Yorkshire miners were beginning to close every Notts. pit by mass picketing at the end of the first week but the deal worked out between Chadburn and Jack Taylor whereby Yorkshire pits wouldn't picket Notts. in return for a 2 day strike in Notts. until a ballot was held gave the ruling class all the time it needed to re-organise and bus and fly in 8,000 police. The ballot on the Friday voted to continue working. By the following Monday the Notts. coalfield was under police control. This was a turning point in the strike. Contrast this with events in South Wales where, after voting not to strike, the Welsh miners changed their minds after talking to Yorkshire pickets. In these two episodes hangs the lesson of the strike: miners' self-organisation and not dubious union deals are the only ways to ensure that a struggle doesn't stagnate. If a strike movement ever hesitates it gives the ruling class time to regroup its forces. It also shows what a powerful ideological weapon a ballot is. After all, each person voting appears democratic, but the bosses well know that individual workers acting in the "privacy" - i.e. isolation - of their own homes and faced with immediate problems like the rent or the mortgage payments, are more likely to opt for not "sticking their necks out".

But the class struggle isn't fought by workers acting as individuals but by solid- arising together as a class. Working class democracy, therefore, is not based on workers acting as atomised individuals, but on mass meetings where discussion and voting can take place and where workers can elect strike committees to put forward their own aims and slogans. And slogans are significant for what they reveal politically.

In this strike miners have fought under the reactionary slogan of "Coal for the Country, Not Dole for the Miners". Not only does this isolate the miners from other workers who are facing redundancy, but it puts the whole argument on the grounds of what is best for "the national capital". Miners' leaders demanded subsidies and extra-protection from "foreign" coal (ignoring the solidarity that Australian dockers and miners have shown to British miners in refusing to allow coal to be delivered to Britain). But this is what union leaders do all over the world. French steel union leaders, for example, have recently been calling for the protection of "their" industry from foreign competition. The logic of it is to defend "our capitalism", "our country", against "theirs".

By fighting on this terrain the workers will never win. If there is one thing the present crisis shows it is the irrationality of capitalism. It is absurd to want to keep men underground when modern machinery can free them to do something far less dangerous. But the only "something" capitalism offers today is the dole. The only real victory for the miners is not to be found in doing capitalism's rotten jobs but in organising to do away with the whole rotting system

C.W.O.

Unemployment, inflation, war! Now's not the time for sitting around and doing nothing.

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