

WORKERS VOICE

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MINERS STRIKE AT THE CROSSROADS

Each day that passes increases the significance of the miners strike. The endurance, solidity and combativity of the 130,000 miners on strike has been an inspiration to workers everywhere. Not only in Britain, where it has encouraged Leyland, Vauxhall, Ford and other workers to take up the fight against austerity, but from Japan and Poland to Belgium the British miners' cause has inspired other workers. A victory for the miners, in temporarily pushing back the onslaught of the bosses, will encourage other workers to fight. Their defeat will make the bosses redouble their attacks. That is why the fight of the miners is the fight of the whole working class. As the strike enters the winter months, and really begins to bite, the bosses and government are beginning to panic. But as the chances of victory increase, so too do the dangers facing the class.

The increasing effectiveness of the strike was already worrying the bosses, before the decision of the NACODS men to strike was made. The slashing of the price of oil by the government, and the dramatic fall in the value of the pound in mid-October showed that, for the first time the ruling class both in Britain and abroad was losing confidence in the ability of Thatcher and MacGregor to defeat the miners. The effects of a strike by the elite of the pit men would have ended all coal production, hastened the depletion of stocks, and increased the economic impact of the strike via damaged plant and machinery. From the beginning NACODS was desperate to avoid a strike, and finally called it off trusting that the craft identity of its members would over-ride their class loyalty. In this it has acted like the other unions, in particular the ISTC and EPTU which have ensured the miners isolation. While removing the imminence of a crunch in the strike, neither the NACODS decision nor the increasing coal imports will be enough to avoid a crisis in power generation over the winter, especially after the decision by open-cast miners to ban coal movements.

New Dangers:

From Within and Without

Despite all the talk by government ministers of coal stocks lasting throughout the winter and power cuts being unlikely, it is clear that the government and coal board have one option open to ensure a defeat of the miners on the scale envisaged when Cortonwood was closed. That is the option to move pithead coal stocks in the first instance to the power stations. This is the meaning of the sudden police action in stopping miners in Yorkshire selling pithead coal

to sustain the strike. And while it was possible to maintain a steel works such as Ravenscraig by convoys of scab lorries from private firms, keeping the power stations open could only be done by a large scale military operation. Preparations are undoubtedly being made for this eventuality, possibly concentrating on key stations, so that a symbolic defeat is inflicted on the miners to sap their morale. At that point the question of victory or defeat will be in the balance.

In that context the crucial issue will be for the miners to appeal directly to the power workers not to handle scab coal, in addition to not increasing electricity output from oil and gas and nuclear fuel. Indeed, the latter demand should already have been made, as a significant increase in generation from these sources has already taken place, with the blessing of the strike-breaking EPTU. Mass picketing of the power stations will be necessary to enforce this demand, but it needs to be accompanied by active appeals for solidarity and generalisation of the struggle. As we said in a recent leaflet on the strike:

"No amount of militant fight by the miners alone will defeat the bosses, who have ranged the whole of the might of the capitalist state against the miners; they have spent more on defeating the miners, than in fighting the whole Falklands war, and turned whole regions of the country into mini-police states. The key to victory lies in the spread of the struggle to other sections of the working class. Instead of token support, the miners need more active help, like the kind briefly given by some of the dockers over moving scab coal to Ravenscraig, or the London printworkers who stopped production of the Sun for its attacks on the miners.

But more important is for other workers to launch their own struggles, to open other fronts in the fightback, and to link these fights with those of the miners through joint picketing, demonstrations etc. Everywhere workers are facing the SAME problems as the miners; threats of redundancy, falling real wages, infernal increases in exploitation...

Any attempt to generalise and unite the struggles leads to a conflict with the trades unions, which divide the workers section by section, and restrain any struggle within the bounds acceptable to capitalism. Thus the TUC has passed meaningless motions in support of the miners, which are designed to leave them ISOLATED. The ISTC has openly supported the use of police-escorted scab coal convoys,

and the EPTU has indicated that it will call upon power workers to "work on" to defeat the miners. "Communist Party" stalwart McGahey says NOTHING while millions of tons of Polish coal floods into east coast ports, to ease the debts of crisis-ridden Polish state capitalism. Scargill, too, is playing a double game; class struggle talk on the one hand, while on the other channelling the strike into a crusade for the return of a Labour government, hand in hand with Benn.

Workers, don't forget that Benn closed more pits from 75-79 than has MacGregor, and that he was also responsible for the infamous productivity deal of 1977, which divided miner against miner, and led to today's scabbing by the Notts. miners. The NUM forced this through AGAINST the results of a ballot by the miners. The Labour Party, trades unions and "Communist" Party stand exposed as the LEFT WING OF CAPITALISM, fighting NOT for socialism, but for STATE CAPITALISM."

Violence and the Struggle

The role of the unions in hamstringing the class struggle has been shown in their attitude to the question of violence. Realising that to oppose violence would simply lead to its generalisation, the NUM leadership have instead recuperated it through their apparent endorsement of it. In our last issue we noted and welcomed the increasing violence displayed by the miners, and hailed their break with legality as a great step forward.

"Over the past weeks we have seen the miners abandoning the tired, useless framework of trade union "legality", and engaging in guerrilla actions which are embryonic civil war... Commando groups have been organised to bomb lorry depots carrying coal blacked by railmen, and NCB property has been systematically destroyed... In many pit villages attacks on police stations have been organised, of which the near insurrections at Fitzwilliam and Maltby were only the most spectacular...

The miners in their increasing use of organised class violence are pointing the way towards civil war, and their actions are to be welcomed. Communists must call for their intensification and generalisation."

But the essence of a communist intervention is to develop and adopt tactics as the strike develops, to emphasise at particular points what the key issues are, and to formulate a strategy for carrying the struggle forward. To simply repeat abstract litanies at all points of the strike, regardless of the dynamic of the struggle itself, is only moralising. Thus we see that the situation in

(Continued on page 2)

Editorial US ELECTIONS

DEMOCRACY PREPARES AUSTERITY

This month sees the myth of democracy enacted in its most odious form, in the shape of an American presidential election, with all the razmataz and philistinism that accompanies this most transparent of all electoral circuses. Once again the American masses are called upon to acquiesce, as atomised citizens, in their own exploitation and the preparations for their own destruction. For, whoever wins the election, the U.S. ruling class will continue with their attacks on the living standards of the American workers, and with their relentless drive towards war. And all this will be legitimised as the 'will of the people' by the electoral charade.

In the likely event of the re-election of Reagan and the Republicans, the U.S. will continue in its policy of military preparation and armed confrontation with the real or supposed surrogates of Russian imperialism in Central America, the Middle East and elsewhere. Economically, however, the present U.S. policies of high interest rates and high budget deficits would lead to repercussions that could shatter the cohesiveness of the U.S. bloc, by bankrupting several of its members, as we outlined in detail in WV 17, in "The Crisis of Finance Capitalism". Despite the election rhetoric then, the post election period will see deflationary measures pursued, by means of tax increases and a rise in unemployment. A similar economic policy would be pursued by the Democrats, but they would seek to cement the Western alliance and outflank the Russians by trying to build "democratic" agents of U.S. imperialism while still, as did the Carter administration, carrying out re-armament. The political parties in the election thus represent differing factions within the U.S.

ruling class, and are of no importance-except as manoeuvres to be exposed to the U.S. working class.

One fact that is significant and positive, is that more than in any other country, elections in the U.S.A. are largely a middle class affair. The polls seldom top 50%, and the rate of abstentionism amongst workers, both black and white, is enormous. But realisation that both parties are parties of millionaires, and that the political system is rotten, is still far removed from the positive awareness of the need to destroy the state, including its "democratic" apparatus, and to create an alternative, working class state. Despite the brief appearance of Soviets in many American cities (noteable Seattle) in the great fights of 1919-21, and despite its quite unparalleled history of violent economic battles, the U.S. working class remains devoid of class consciousness. This is a living proof, as was the history of the British working class in the nineteenth century, that economic struggles, though preparing the ground for, do not themselves produce, class consciousness. The weight of the U.S. proletariat, which accounts for around 45% of the world's industrial output, in any worldwide class movement needs no emphasising; what does is the urgent need to create a communist vanguard in America.

In the meantime, the real conflict in U.S. society continues, with strikes emerging in the coal and auto industries. The increasing attacks that will be made on living standards in the U.S., will provide the basis for wider struggles, and the possibilities of revolutionary intervention, hastening the day when the whole barbaric political superstructure of American capitalism can be destroyed, along with its economic foundations.

BRITISH MINERS (cont. from page 1)

regard to the violence has altered, and the NUM has largely recuperated this, just as it recuperated flying pickets. The NUM has turned violence into ritualistic confrontations with the police at points of lesser importance. Thus, during the second dockers strike, we saw thousands of pickets confronting one or two miners returning to work, instead of being directed to those docks where there had been no strike. Real workers violence continues, eg. at Grimethorpe, where police have been attacked for their reign of terror in the village. But the suppleness of the NUM, in controlling the miners, whose loyalty it retains, has once again been demonstrated.

The majority of the striking miners still see the strike as a "miners affair", and belt-tightening as the key to victory. While they welcome sympathy action, they do not see the need for generalisation, not seeing that 1984 is not 1974, and conditions today are less favourable to the miners. However, a militant minority exists which wants to fight in a more violent way, and sees, confusedly, the need to broaden the struggle despite their illusion that the NUM leadership shares their perspectives. It is this group which can and must go directly to other workers, especially power workers, to spread the struggle, and it is through their actions that the possibility of breaking from union control can emerge. And just as it was not necessary for such a minority to have the sanction of elected strike committees to carry out the violence, neither is it necessary for them to operate under such formal methods of organisation to spread the strike. Indeed, in present conditions, elected strike committees would simply dilute the most advanced workers into a passive majority, and fall under indirect NUM control. The "formal" break with the union cannot come until the political conditions for it exist. These political conditions are maturing, as the NUM, having rode the whirlwind, remains in control of the strike. It will be hard for the NCB and the NUM to concoct a scheme to get an orderly return to work. After having struggled so long, the miners will not settle for the NCB closure scheme, modified and disguised as a victory. But the intervention of ACAS, and the possibility, already floated in the NACODS talks, of an "independent" review body for dealing with pit closures, offers one possibility for a NCB/NUM deal. After this, pits could be picked off one by one, with the likelihood of another massive response by the miners lessened. As the strike nears an end, the demands of the workers will change, to a rejection of any ACAS "review" body, to the sacking of scabs, withdrawal of criminalisation and sacking of miners, and to a scrapping of the infamous 1978 productivity deal. At the moment, however, the main priority of the strike is to direct all available resources to the power stations.

Whether the struggle wins (by which we mean temporarily halts the bosses onslaught on the class) or is defeated, the real gains will be in the alteration of the balance of forces it has wrought in Britain, and in whether the political lessons on the role of the state, and the role of the trades unions, as well as the question of the organisation of future struggles, are assimilated by the most advanced elements of the class.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Due to meetings on the miners strike in Motherwell and Barnsley the October Glasgow meeting on the Iran-Iraq War was postponed. We apologise for any inconvenience. This meeting: THE IRAN - IRAQ WAR AND THE WORKING CLASS will now be held at the beginning of December. Contact Glasgow for details and watch for local advertising.

Regular readers meetings also take place in Northern England to discuss our publications. The next meeting will be in LEEDS on Wednesday Nov. 21st at 8.00 p.m. in Leeds Trades Club, Savile Mount, Leeds 7.

For meetings in the London area contact our London address.

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The deepening of the crisis and the corresponding aim of communists to deepen their interventions in the working class, means an increasing burden on the financial resources of the C.W.O. We are totally dependent on the contributions of our members, supporters and sympathisers, practical and financial.

We appeal to our readers to help us in any way they can. Any donations, large or small, will help maintain and broaden our work.

positions of the C.W.O.

- * Every country in the world today is capitalist - including the so-called Communist states (for example Russia and China).
- * Trade unions and shop stewards cannot defend the interests of the working class.
- * The struggle for communism cannot be waged through Parliament, but must be carried out through workers' councils with recallable delegates.
- * The working class can only come to power through the creation of its own political party: the international communist party.
- * The capitalist system is in crisis and irretrievable decline. It can only offer inflation and unemployment and it cannot be reformed. The only choice for the future is war or revolution: BARBARISM or COMMUNISM

COMMUNIST REVIEW

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- Where we have come from and where we are going
- Platform and Statutes of the Bureau
- On the formation of the Communist Party of Iran
- Crisis and Imperialism

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IN COMMEMORATION OF THE ASTURIAS SOVIET

INTRODUCTION

Fifty years ago the miners of the Asturias rose against the Spanish Republic in a massive display of proletarian self-organisation and ingenuity. In this article we look at their heroism and draw the lessons for the coming wave of class struggle

The First World War which began in 1914 exposed the capitalist nature of the so-called "socialist" parties of Europe as they rushed to find reasons why workers should kill each other in defence of their "own" imperialist masters. However the Spanish state managed to avoid entering this conflict and thus the Spanish Socialist Party (the PSOE) and the anarcho-syndicalist movement (CNT) were not once revealed as anti-proletarian bodies. In the case of the PSOE they showed their reactionary nature when they collaborated with the military dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera (under whom the PSOE leader became Minister of Labour) and after they had formed an alliance with the parties of the leaders of Spanish capitalism (the second ranked Socialist, Prieto, was himself a millionaire) to form the Spanish Republic in 1931. But even when they were in power and called out troops to massacre a pathetic millenarian uprising by destitute anarchist labourers at Casas Viejas in 1933 they kept their working class base. In Spain, as elsewhere workers illusions in the old parties remained.

Casas Viejas led to the collapse of the first coalition government of the Republic and the PSOE, like all labour parties in opposition tried to control its working class base by becoming more radical in its rhetoric. During 1934 the PSOE founded local "workers alliances" with other left-wing organisations in an attempt to blot out the memory of its record in government. The highpoint of these radical words came when the CEDA, a right wing party which had not taken an oath of allegiance to the Spanish Republic looked as though it might get into the government. Largo Caballero, the PSOE leader now threatened an insurrection if this did happen. But the Workers Alliance did nothing to prepare for an armed struggle. No arms were distributed, no militias formed and no plans for fraternisation with the "quintas" or conscripts were made. Thus when the CEDA did enter the government the bluff of the PSOE was called. Largo Caballero called a general strike but generously allowed the government 24 hours to prepare. However the Madrid working class took to the streets immediately on the same day, hoping that the PSOE's vague promises of arms would be fulfilled. By Oct. 12th the Spanish capital had been paralysed for 8 days but the PSOE had still done nothing. On October 13th they called for a return to work claiming a victory (all that had happened in Madrid was the arrest of Largo Caballero). And in Barcelona the CNT did little more despite the fact that the workers had spontaneously raised barricades in the streets. For the anarchists this was just a political struggle and nothing to do with them. In this fashion the CNT also played its part in isolating the Asturian workers.

THE ASTURIAN SOVIET

Only in Asturias where the control of the so-called political leaders of the working class wasn't so strong did the combativity of the workers find real expression. Armed at first only with sticks of dynamite the miners of this Northern region captured the barracks of the Civil Guard (the armed police) and distributed their arms. Taking as their slogan U.H.P. which means United Proletarian Brothers workers of all political factions soon conquered all the mining villages seizing 30,000 rifles in the process. In one place, La Felguera, the miners even built armoured cars and bomb throwing machines to

make up for the shortage of rifles and ammunition. With these the whole of Asturias, including the main port of Oviedo, fell to the miners by October 7th.

It was a genuine proletarian movement which went beyond the bourgeois manoeuvres of the PSOE.

"Through its very movement, the action of the proletariat destroyed the State institutions and

capitalist ownership. Power was based on local workers' committees, with the aid of the armed proletariat, and ownership was generally redistributed without any kind of formalities." (G. Munis Jalones de derrota: promesa de victoria p.157. [CWO translation])

Unable to use the conscripts of the Spanish regular army, the Madrid Government resorted to a 40,000 strong force of Franco's Foreign Legion and Moorish Troops. Despite its artillery and brutality (all prisoners were shot on capture) this force could only make rapid progress in the coastal areas. In the mountain passes of Asturias the miners held firm.

And just as the Socialist leaders in Madrid were betraying the struggle they had called for so too did the Asturian socialist deputies desert the working class. Having learned from Madrid that there would be no general rising, these socialists quickly told the Asturian workers to lay down their arms and then escaped, leaving the workers to their fate. The workers, however, re-elected their revolutionary committees which were now "made up of the most advanced of the Asturian proletariat" (Munis) instead of the Socialist time servers. The unequal struggle between the miners and Franco's troops lasted another week until the miners began to run out of ammunition and it became clear to the workers that nowhere else in Spain



U.H.P. (Unite Proletarian Brothers) - the proletarian slogan of 1934 had become by 1937 the slogan of the bourgeois Republic

had other workers imitated their actions. In the face of this isolation the delegates of the Provincial Committee of the Asturian workers signed a truce with the local army commander Lopez Ochoa. Despite this agreement the revenge wreaked by the "army of order" in Asturias was amongst the most barbaric in a decade of barbarous acts.

"The agreement between Lopez Ochoa and the Provincial Committee by which he first promised to occupy the mining districts with the Moorish regulars and the Foreign Legion in the rear-guard was formally respected but the atrocities went on increasing day by day. The Civil Guard added its contribution by carrying out assassinations en masse. Just as in the Middle Ages military leaders allowed their mercenary troops the right of sack in cities which resisted, so the reaction allowed its mercenaries free rein to pillage, right of assassination, and including the right of violation. Whole families, from the new-born to grandparents were completely exterminated. An infinity of men were tortured and beaten to death by the "army of order". Hundreds were murdered and clandestinely buried." (ibid)

In all nearly 5,000 workers were murdered and a further 30,000 were imprisoned and tortured. The PSOE leaders were soon amnesied but Largo Caballero's false reputation as "the Spanish Lenin" was fabricated when he was given a 30 year prison sentence that he was never expected to serve.

Until the final victory of the international socialist revolution all struggles of the working class are in some sense or other defeats but the defeat of the Asturian miners

went beyond the physical slaughter of the workers.

Had the crushing of the Asturian October led to the political exposure of the anti-revolutionary character of the PSOE, CNT and also the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) then the dead would not have died in vain. Unfortunately the events not only gave the PSOE leaders the undeserved crowns of martyrs but even saw the beginnings of the formation of the Popular Front government that was elected in February 1936. What had been a workers alliance aimed at setting up a soviet republic in 1934 now became part of the policy of Soviet imperialism which, in its aim to get an alliance with Britain and France, called upon workers to "defend democracy from the fascist menace". Thus the Asturian miners of 1934 who had fought against the capitalist Republic found themselves in 1936 taking up arms again - this time in its defence! Defence of democracy replaced the struggle for socialism and in this sense the Spanish Civil War from 1936-39 became a dress rehearsal for the 2nd World War since "defence of democracy" was what the anti-Hitler alliance of Britain, Russia and the USA also used to win the workers to another imperialist butchery from 1939-45.

Today the working class throughout the world is not under the direction of false socialist leaders as it was in 1914 or 1934. But neither has it found its own expression of its growing awareness of the bankruptcy of capital. And the chief lesson of Asturias is that without an independent proletarian organisation workers can be led into a struggle in which, despite their heroism and capacity for self-organisation, they cannot escape from the alternatives of bourgeois politics. Such an organisation, in 1934, would have based its perspectives on the bourgeois political crisis which existed and put forward a proletarian response. This would have been to expose both the "anti-fascism" of the PSOE and the non-political abstentionism of the CNT, and to have called for solidarity action of all Spanish workers with those of the Asturias. Communists do not ignore the political crises of the bourgeoisie such as that which preceded Asturias, nor do they turn their backs on movements which begin with the working class under the domination of bourgeois forces. On the contrary they use the space opened up by these crises and movements to mobilise for a genuine class response and the transformation of the movement into an anti-capitalist one. Asturias '34 shows, on a small scale, that this is possible, given a communist presence in the working class.

In the 1930s the workers in Spain were isolated from the rest of the working class in Europe which had been physically crushed in its great struggles of the previous decade. Today, from Poland to Peru, the international working class is beginning to break from the long nightmare of those defeats and it is beginning to create genuine communist organisations all over the world. The international unification of those forces and their increasing influence within the working class are essential if bourgeois ideology in its thousand forms is to be crushed. Only thus can the glorious future glimpsed by the Asturian miners be turned into reality.

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CAPITALIST EL AND COMM

Communists aim to create a classless and stateless society in which the familiar tools of class violence such as the police, the judiciary and the army will no longer exist. However, communists also recognise that such a society can only be built once the present society is destroyed; the change from the present capitalist society to a communist one necessarily involves violent revolution in which many lives will be lost.

"A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part, by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon, - authoritarian means, if such there be at all; and if the victorious party does not want to have fought in vain, it must maintain this rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionaries." (Engels, On Authority Selected Works p.639)

People often ask, "Why is it that this change cannot be accomplished peacefully using the existing so-called democratic institutions of capitalist society such as parliament?" There are two main reasons why communism cannot come about through parliament - the first concerns the nature of democracy in capitalist society, and the second concerns the development of workers consciousness under conditions of capitalist domination.

Democracy and Capitalism

Present day society consists of two main classes who face one another as deadly enemies, the capitalist class and the working class. The capitalist class lives on the surplus which it extracts from the workers, a surplus which it gets hold of by means of the capitalist relations of production. The totality of these relations of production, such as wage labour, commodity production, division of labour, trade etc constitute the "economic structure" of society. It is on this foundation that the political and legal superstructure of society is erected. Democracy is simply one of a number of political superstructures which can be erected on the capitalist economic foundation, and it is this foundation which must be changed before any real change can occur in society. The economic structure of all countries in the world today is capitalist. However, the political and legal superstructures vary according to differences in the details of these relations of production as well as historical and social factors. Certain countries, notably those of Western Europe and North America, have democratic systems which are a reflection of their economic strength, while others such as in South America or Africa, have military dictatorships which are a reflection of their economic weakness, their domination by the industrially advanced countries and the consequent violent character of the class struggle. Russia and Eastern Europe have party dictatorships, which are again a reflection of their economic weakness and their historical

evolution. All these political forms are, however, based on capitalist relations of production and express the rule of the capitalist class over society. The state and its appendages, whether military or parliamentary, are instruments of class rule, and the idea of using such as instruments of class emancipation are ludicrous.

Capitalist Dictatorship

In the case of the naked military dictatorships such as those of South America it is perfectly obvious that we are dealing with the dictatorship of the capitalist class over the workers, but this is no less true in the case of democracies such as Britain. The democratic superstructure is based on capitalist exploitation of the working class just as firmly as the military dictatorship. Democracy in capitalist society is simply an elaborate camouflage for the dictatorship of the capitalist class. The capitalist class pretend that the reason we have capitalism in Britain is because the people have democratically decided on it, or at least have decided not to change it. This is a ridiculous lie, and in reality democracy is simply another weapon in the capitalist arsenal which they use against the working class.

Parliamentarism developed as the political representation characteristic of bourgeois society in its classic phase. But Marxists realise that "democracy" and the granting of the franchise to all "citizens" does not prevent the organs of the state constituting a machine for the defence of the capitalist class nor does it prevent the state from being a weapon of the bourgeoisie against the working class. To argue otherwise would be to deny the determination of the political superstructure of society by the relations of production which characterise its foundation, i.e. to deny Marxism.

Communists argue that a new form of state power must be created in the revolutionary process - proletarian soviet power. This is in essence anti-democratic, since not only the bourgeoisie and their hirelings, but also the petty bourgeoisie are deprived of political rights. This new form of state, which Marx felt was the Commune state - "The political form, at last discovered, under which can be worked out the economic emancipation of labour" - we now know to be the Soviet state, based on the experience of the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 in Russia. Democratic ideas are dangerous, since they spread the illusion that socialism can be achieved peacefully by ballot box manoeuvres, and weaken the resolve of the proletariat to deal with the opponents of socialism by depriving them of political rights.

Nor can the working class express its identity as a class via the ballot box: atomised as separate "citizens" amongst other citizens, the worker votes as a bourgeois individual, subject to the dominant organs of the fabricators of ideas in capitalist society (media, press, pulpit etc). The proletariat can only express itself as a class through class action, such as strikes, mass meetings, picketing etc. And as the bourgeoisie well knows, and shows by its hysteria, these actions are "anti-democratic". The working class shows its identity through anti-ballot box action, by abstention, by boycott, and finally by attacks on and destruction of bourgeois parliamentarism and the whole myth of representation by corrupted individuals who are beyond any control by the working class.

"It is necessary to shatter the bourgeois lie according to which every clash between opposing political parties, every struggle for power, must necessarily take place

within the democratic mechanism, that is through elections and parliamentary debates. We cannot succeed in destroying that lie without breaking with the traditional method of calling on workers to vote in elections side by side with members of the bourgeoisie and ending up in a situation where the delegates of the proletariat act on the same parliamentary ground as the bourgeoisie." (Theses on Parliamentarism of the Abstentionist Fraction of the Italian Socialist Party (1920) - in Revolutionary Perspectives 3 p47.)

Capitalist Savagery

Over the last 100 years the capitalist class has shown with horrifying clarity the savagery to which it resorts when the real basis of its dictatorship over society is threatened. It will fight tooth and nail to maintain its privileges even when this means the destruction of civilization built up over hundreds of years. From the butchery of the Paris Commune to the massacres of revolutionaries in Germany and Italy to the suppression of the more recent workers struggles such as those in Hungary and Poland, it is evident that the capitalists will never give up the power until they are militarily crushed. To imagine that the basis of present society could be changed by majorities in parliament is simply to indulge in childish dreams - dreams which are inexcusable today.

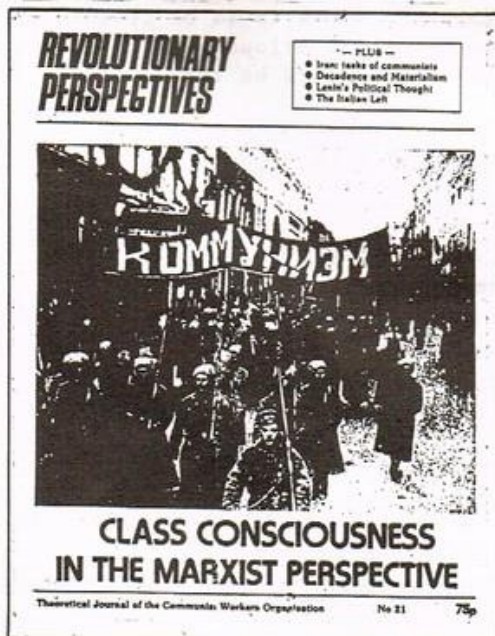
Marx and Engels in the 1840s imagined that the workers could in certain countries use the democratic institutions of capitalism to gain power, and in the Communist Manifesto they speak of the proletariat winning the "battle for democracy". In this they were mistaken and corrected themselves. Engels wrote in the preface to the English edition of the Communist Manifesto (1888):

One thing especially is proved by the Commune, that the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes."

Marx himself, in his study of the events of the Paris Commune recognised that the Commune could not have survived at all without the destruction of elements of the capitalist state such as the police, judiciary and standing army and criticised the communards for leaving intact sections of the state such as the banking system. In his critique of the Gotha Programme, Marx expressed this most clearly:

"Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. There corresponds to this also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat."

It is therefore necessary for the capitalist state machinery to be destroyed and for the working class to construct their own state machinery in order to effect the transition to classless society. It is this workers state which withers away as classes disappear and society approaches communism. However, the destruction of the capitalist state power necessarily entails violence. "But," people ask, "why couldn't the army and police who consist of members of the working class simply refuse to support the capitalists causing bourgeois power to collapse?" Such a defection of capitalism's hirelings, who are armed mercenaries and retainers, not proletarians, could only take place in the course of revolution. This brings us to the



LECTIONS

MUNISM

second main reason why the democratic institutions of capitalism couldn't be used for taking power and constructing communism peacefully; the majority of the working class are dominated by capitalist ideas and will remain so while capitalism continues to function.

Formation of Ideas

Marxists are materialist and recognise that the ideas of classes are in the last analysis a reflection of the material world which they perceive through practice. In a similar way the social ideas or social consciousness of the class is derived from the economic structure workers perceive in material life. Things which appear normal to most people today such as working for wages and exchanging these for food and clothing and housing would have appeared quite extraordinary to people in feudal times or in the earlier period when production was based on slavery. As Marx wrote,

"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but their social existence which determines their consciousness."

Ideas have an historical dimension. Conceptions are conditioned by what has occurred in the past as well as by the social conditions we experience at present. The dominant ideas in society are therefore based on the productive relationships which constitute the economic structure of society, and the interpretation of these relationships which is present in society. This interpretation is inevitably that of the ruling class. This means, as Marx clearly stated in "The German Ideology" that within class society,

"The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas..."

Thus in general the ideas of the ruling capitalist class will be the dominant ideas amongst the working class. Such a conclusion is an inescapable result of a materialist understanding of society. The majority of the working class cannot escape the domination of capitalist ideas any more than a man can jump over his shadow. For Marx only the school of revolution could break the hold of capitalist ideas over the majority of the working class:

"Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew." (German Ideology)

Therefore, even if parliament were an institution able to change society (which it isn't), it would not be possible for the majority of the working class to achieve communist con-

sciousness and vote for the establishment of communism. Parliamentary elections can at best measure the extent of the intellectual domination of the capitalist class over the workers. The parliamentary road to socialism is therefore a utopian dream.

To argue, as certain socialists do, that if one worker can be converted to socialism so can a majority is to retreat from the historical materialism of Marx, which understands society in terms of classes based on relations of production, to the bourgeois materialism of the capitalist class. Such materialism starts, not from the study of classes, but from the single individual and generalises from this starting point to society at large. Society, however, does not consist of single "free" individuals and so all the conclusions based on this method of argument are false.

Communist Consciousness

Although, in general, the working class will be dominated by the ideas of the capitalist class this domination can never be total. Capitalist society is founded on class antagonisms which lead to class war. These are material conflicts which the working class experiences in its daily life and which directly contradict the ideas of the capitalist class. They form the basis for communist ideas or communist consciousness. Communists understand and interpret the events of the class struggle in the light of the class's historical evolution, its historical attempts to liberate itself from capitalist oppression and its future role in the creation of communism. The raw material of the class struggle is actively restructured in the light of the historical materialist understanding of society. The communist consciousness so produced is in total contradiction with the dominant capitalist interpretation of events in society. However, while capitalism continues to function this consciousness will only be achieved by a minority of the working class. This conclusion does not, however, mean (as the parliamentary socialists maintain) that communism is impossible.

Communist Revolution

To achieve communism it is necessary for the minority who understand the true nature of present society and the need for communism to give a lead in the battles of the working class. Although they will remain a minority until the period of actual collapse of the capitalist structure, by giving a political and practical lead in the material battles of the working class they will be able to draw broad masses under the communist banner. The politicisation of these masses will proceed in step with their practical struggle and will become easier as the lies on which the capitalist ideas are based become exposed in practice. It is not necessary for a majority of workers to understand the communist programme before the decisive battles for communism and the destruction of capitalism are entered. These battles will themselves provide the soil for the growth of communist consciousness and a massive strengthening of the communist forces. It will however be impossible to construct communist society without the active participation of the majority of the world's workers. This does not mean that formal majorities are required in every country but an overall majority in the capitalist heartlands is required. This majority can be achieved during the process of revolution itself. This process will, of course, expose today's parliamentary democracy as simply camouflage for capitalist dictatorship which will be swept into the dustbin of history.

Debate with S.P.G.B.

MARXISM OR IDEALISM?

One of the tasks of a revolutionary organisation is to expose and undermine ruling class ideas which exist inside the working class under the guise of socialism. Thus on 27th October the CWO confronted the well-intentioned "socialists" of the SPGB (Socialist Party of Great Britain) who imagine that achieving socialism is simply a matter of persuading a majority of workers of the virtues of a classless, moneyless, stateless society in the future.

For our part our speakers pointed to the non-Marxist and idealist basis of the SPGB's politics which prevent them from understanding anything about the process of revolution and the material basis for the growth of socialist consciousness in the working class. Since the SPGB sees the problem in idealist terms: i.e. as a question of spreading knowledge, they can only ignore the objective circumstances which force the working class as a class to confront capitalism and to seek an alternative. "The crisis - What crisis?" "The possibility of collapse?" For the SPGB stalwarts nothing could be more amusing.

The CWO pointed to the evidence of history to condemn the SPGB's evolutionist scenario of socialism coming about through a democratically elected majority in Parliament with the capitalist class meekly handing over power to their class enemy when this "socialist" parliament withdraws grants to the army! For the SPGB the lesson of the Paris Commune has gone unheeded, while the fact that the ruling class has lived for over a century of universal suffrage and the ballot box without the smallest sign of the working class winning control of parliament (never mind the state) tells them nothing.

When tackled by us as to how the working class will achieve socialism in their scheme of things the SPGB were dishonest. Instead of defending their view of socialism via the ballot box, they announced that Parliament was only one of many possible ways - soviets could be another! Given their oft published view that policemen are part of the working class, just like any other wage earner (it doesn't matter what job they do) and that strikes and industrial action are irrelevant to the struggle for socialism (due to the fact that workers aren't knowledgeable!), we asked if the miners' strike had any significance for them and if so, quite simply, which side are they on when it comes down to workers battling against the armed might of the state? One speaker announced that "personally" he was with the miners while the other seemed to be trying to solve the question of class solidarity with family ties by announcing that many miners had cousins who were policemen!

Sadly this was the level the SPGB chose to debate at. According to them the Marxist view of class consciousness can be summed up in "the CWO thinks the workers are thick". Smart, we said, from a party which sees its task as spreading knowledge to 'ignorant' workers and complains, for example about the Falklands War as "another doleful example of ignorant workers being easily duped by the empty jingoism of desperate politicians" (Socialist Standard May 1982)

The issue is not that the workers don't know what socialism is about (many do) but in their atomised existence under capitalism they don't see how this can be achieved. Today's collective struggles are a preparation for tomorrow's revolution which will give the working class the confidence and the means to begin the task of building a new society.

For us the value of this debate was that it starkly exposed the SPGB as an enemy of the "real movement" of the working class.

6 Review: Racism and the Class Struggle

Hand on the Sun by Tariq Mehmood, published in paperback by Penguin Books at £1.75.

In 1976 an 18 year old Asian youth, Gurdip Singh Chaggar, was attacked and murdered by a gang of white racists in Southall.

Instead of settling for token demonstrations organised by the self-appointed representatives of the Asian "community", young Asian workers in Southall took the natural course of action and organised for their own self-defence.

After these events in Southall the Asian Youth Movement (AYM), as it came to call itself, spread throughout Britain's Asian ghettos. The young generation of the Asian working class had come of age and in doing so was rejecting the traditional attitudes of resignation and submission for which their parents were reknowned.

The author of Hand on the Sun is part of this new generation. He was one of the initial organisers of the AYM in Bradford and when this eventually split as it was bought off by the State through grants from bodies like the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) he helped organise the United Black Youth League (UBYL) which aimed to unite Asian and West Indian workers independently of the state's community relations machine. In 1981 he and eleven others were arrested for conspiracy against the state after Bradford police found 2 crates of petrol bombs. In the witness box "Mehmood" did not deny manufacturing bombs but argued they were made in self-defence - against an impending attack by racists which the police knew about and had done nothing to prevent.

The book is not about the 1981 events or the trial of the Bradford 12. It is a description of the formative experiences of those who were later to form the AYM in Bradford - i.e. Asian working class youth who, if not born here, were young enough to go through the schooling system. In the mills the bosses successfully divided the workforce on a racial basis. The longer hours and lower pay of the Asian workers; whites in supervisory jobs; the racist trade union organiser conniving with management to prevent strikes and a fight for a living wage ("Asian workers always viewed union officials with contempt, comparing them to corrupt government officials at home."). At home and in the streets the continual racist attacks ("Hardly a night went by without the sound of someone's windows breaking, followed by the sound of running feet.") and the pretended powerlessness of the police to prevent them. Instead, the ever-present power of the state manifested in the arbitrary and perpetually changing Immigration Laws which give the police pretexts for arresting black workers and raiding their homes at all hours of the day and night.

Apart from its documentary value the book is worth reading for the political questions it poses. Mehmood is not only concerned with fighting racism he also, not very coherently, wants a class fight against capitalism. He sees that racism is rooted in imperialism, in capital's need for cheap labour, its usefulness to the ruling class as a means to 'divide and rule' and he is looking for a solution. As the book describes how the Asian youth came to organise to defend their areas against attack and how leading a fight against redundancies at work meant organising the workers without the "help" of the local trade union organiser, so it traces the central character's disillusion with left-wing capitalist organisations. At the beginning of the book he is a member of the newly-formed SWP (Socialist Workers Party). By the end he has left to form the AYM along with friends who have broken with other leftist organisations such as Militant. However, before revolutionaries start cheering, it must be noted that the young militants' disillusion does not involve a criticism of these groups' politics. It is the absence of any concrete tactic or guide to action whenever the would-be political leader is faced with a real situation of confrontation which leads to the disillusion. Hussain, intent on organising the workers in his mill, finds the ground swept from under his feet when he sees how the union organiser is in league with the bosses. It is an older, more experienced shop floor militant who realises the next fight must be without the union.

During the process of organising against the racist thugs he realises that slogans alone are no answer to the concrete problem of how to act. It would be easy to explain this impotence simply as the result of reformist leftist politics. After all, how can an organisation which believes that the trade unions are the basis for organising the working class prepare its militants for leading a struggle outside of the union framework? This is true, but it ignores a deeper problem which is central to the question of creating a revolutionary party which has real roots in the working class. - The problem of how to develop from a propagandist organisation into an organisation whose militants have the political clarity and concrete policies to lead workers' struggles as they occur in the real world. If revolutionaries cannot provide a practical answer to the question of "What do we do?" and "How do we fight?" the communist programme will remain hidden from the bulk of the working class.

It is unMarxist for revolutionaries to argue that racism is a secondary issue, an effect rather than the cause of black workers' oppression. This kind of theoretical abstraction only leads to abstentionism in practice. Of course capitalism is the real enemy of both black and white workers. Of course racism cannot be abolished within capitalist relations. But this only means that racist oppression is a permanent aspect of capitalism. For the black worker it is part and parcel of capitalist exploitation. In the real world it is impossible to separate racist oppression and harassment from the rest of capital's attacks. Faced with physical attacks on their lives and their homes, black workers have no alternative but to organise for their own defence. Those Asian workers who have realised that the traditional community leaders and their Uncle Tom organisations are no basis for a real defence and who are trying to organise independently of them can only be welcomed by revolutionaries. This does not mean that we support separatist black organisations any more than we support "separatist" miners' organisations, it is simply welcoming the beginning of an organised response to the state and the bosses' violence.

However, for any organisation which springs from the class in response to an immediate, specific attack the problem of "Where to go from here?" and "How to maintain organisational autonomy?" is posed. The answer to both questions is political and because Mehmood is politically confused Hand on the Sun provides no answer to them. The book describes how the AYM was formed by ex-militants of left-wing capitalist organisations who deliberately avoided giving the organisation political aims - despite the obvious political implications of their activity. With the majority of its members coming to regard the AYM as a sort of social club it's not surprising that it soon became another cog in the state's community relations machine. The UBYL which split from it and sought to unite black youth whatever their origin became involved in campaigns for individual Asians threatened or imprisoned by the Immigration Laws (e.g. the Free Anwar Ditta campaign). It did not succeed in attracting West Indians to its ranks and without any contact with a real revolutionary organisation (as against left-wing capitalist factions) it could not develop a clear revolutionary direction. The danger is that disillusion with leftism and ignorance of a revolutionary political alternative will mean militant black workers who start with a healthy desire to fight capitalism as a whole become lost to communist politics as they retreat into their communities and start apologising for traditional conservative values simply by their failure to criticise. There are traces of this in Hand on the Sun when, for example, Mehmood fails to criticise the Asian elders who in real life went on to denounce the Bradford 12 for breaking the law and "letting down" their villages back home.

But Hand on the Sun also shows us the material basis for a concerted response by black and white workers to the capitalists and their state. Unemployed Asian youth are in exactly the same position as their West Indian or

white counterparts. The schooling system is no more meaningful for white working class kids than it is for black kids. Black and white workers in jobs are all experiencing increased exploitation and the threat of redundancies. Although the ruling class uses racism to divide black and white workers whenever it can capitalism's world crisis knows no racial boundaries and no worker can escape its effects. Whether it is striking miners fighting against the state and strike breakers, unemployed youth protesting against their lot, or black workers organising to protect their communities from racist thugs and police harassment, it is up to revolutionaries to give them support.

However, the role of the revolutionary organisation cannot be limited to that of a support group. Neither are we interested in using the race issue in itself as the basis for recruiting militant black workers. Whenever and wherever we intervene in the daily struggles of the working class our aim is to develop a revolutionary political consciousness amongst the militants involved. We have to point to the wider implications of each struggle and use the immediate experience of the working class as a starting point for a deeper and wider political education. Militants looking for a revolutionary answer to capitalist exploitation and oppression can't find it from their immediate situation alone. This applies equally to black and white workers. There are a whole host of political lessons to be learned from the history of generations of international class struggle, of revolutions and their eventual defeat. The basic issues facing revolutionary Marxists: the nature of the capitalist crisis, imperialism and the national question, the role of the trade unions in the present epoch, the historical alternatives of war or revolution, the necessity for an international proletarian party - all these must be grasped by anyone who wants to be a revolutionary today. It is the task of the existing revolutionaries to bring these lessons to workers whose own struggles are the basis for developing revolutionary class consciousness. As Lenin said in What is to Be Done?, workers understand very well the facts of their daily situation - they don't need to learn how much they are exploited from revolutionaries. What they are looking for are political lessons and a practical political lead. The same thing also holds today for black workers who don't need "revolutionaries" to come and tell them how much they are oppressed but whose political consciousness has not yet gone beyond left-wing capitalist ideology. We make no bones about the fact that we are trying to win over advanced workers to our politics. This isn't merely to swell the ranks of our organisation as an end in itself but an essential part of developing a revolutionary political consciousness within the working class. Only by winning over militant workers - black and white - can revolutionaries begin to lead the class struggle. Without this the creation of the international proletarian party will be impossible. At the same time, without an understanding of the communist programme militant workers will be unable to maintain an independent organisation against capitalism. The question of "building the party" and fighting racism or unemployment are not separate issues, as Hussain in Hand on the Sun learned from his negative experience in the SWP. They are part of the same process of developing class consciousness and establishing a concrete political practice on the part of the revolutionary organisation.

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WORK OF THE INTERNATIONAL BUREAU

In our last edition we published an example of the kind of work undertaken by the Bureau for the Revolutionary Party, which co-ordinates the international work of our organisation, of the P.C.Int (Battaglia Comunista) and comrades in France who share the positions of our two organisations. This was the statement on the Iran/Iraq war and the tasks of communists, aimed at the diaspora from this area, and to promote the adoption of revolutionary positions on the question.

The Bureau is not a regroupment; it is a point of reference and orientation for the tasks, theoretical and practical, of the rebuilding of the international party of the proletariat. Out of the work of the Bureau will come political confrontations and, we hope, collaborations, which will prepare the ground for a future regroupment. However, the Bureau has established political criteria for its work which consist of the points adopted by the first three international communist conferences. These points are sufficient to exclude from its framework both the capitalist left, and the neo-spontaneist and councillist spectrum. These points are:

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

A brief platform and statutes of the Bureau have been printed in its organ Communist Review 1, copies of which are available from the CWO.

We hoped, in taking this initiative, that the Bureau would be the forum for the initiation of contacts on a wider international level. In the last edition of Workers Voice we published a communication received from a group of ex Red Brigade members who are struggling towards communist positions. The Bureau has also received material from a group in India, whose outline statement we printed in the last WV. These materials allow us to clearly place the Indian comrades within the framework outlined above, and we welcome the formation of a communist fraction there. The Bureau has written to the Indian comrades (who show a willingness to engage in political debate) explaining the function of the Bureau:

"Not least the 4th International Conference reaffirmed the need for an organisational reference point, a means for international debate and discussion within an agreed framework as part of the process towards the formation of the future international party. To this end the P.C.Int and the CWO, along with comrades in France, formed the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party (IBRP) in December last year. The Bureau is a means for the adhering organisations to conduct joint international work and its publication, Communist Review, we hope will prove to be a vehicle for international debate and for clarifying the tasks of the party." (IBRP Letter 14.9.84)

In the next edition of WV we will carry a review and critique of the positions of the Revolutionary Proletariat group (now re-named Proletarian Emancipation).

The Bureau has also received a communication from Mexico, from the Communist Collective of Alptram. This group, whose positions we are in the process of studying, expresses itself as anti-parliamentary, for the abolition of wage labour, sees war as the solution to capitalist crisis, and opposes popular fronts and "national revolution". In our preliminary reply and exchange of materials we welcomed their evolution and willingness to debate and

argued:

"revolutionary organisations are not born in a day, with all their theories and policies in order. International discussion serves first and foremost to encourage the maturation, the growth and selection of revolutionary forces." (IBRP Letter 8.8.84)

From Argentina the Bureau has received a communication from a group called Emancipacion Obrera, which most interestingly states,

"During the Falklands War, we were the only political group in Argentina which denounced the war, supported proletarian internationalism, calling for solidarity with the British working class...."War on War" was our slogan."

The materials received from this group show their opposition to frontism of all hues, to national liberation, and for the proletarian dictatorship, as well as an active orientation towards the working class. Again, we are studying their material and will bring fuller details to our readers in due course.

While it would be euphoric to overestimate the significance of these developments, it is nevertheless the case that the emergence of new groups, struggling towards communist positions, signifies the end of the reflux in the communist camp which took place in the mid 1970s, and ended the work of the International Conferences. The accelerating crisis, and equally importantly, the re-birth of class struggle on a wide scale, is providing the basis for a renewed development of the revolutionary avant-garde. This also means that the Bureau can now hopefully orient itself, after suitable preparation by letter and through its press, for the preparation of a future International Conference. To this we hope that not only will these new groups adhere, but also certain older groups, which took part in earlier conferences, once the hard taskmaster of reality has taught them their mistakes, and they place (or replace) themselves within the criteria adopted by earlier conferences.



S.A. MINERS (Cont. from page 8)

into channels safe for capitalism. Communists in this strike would have been calling for election of strike committees and mass picketing (only a minority of workers struck), as well as trying to generalise the fight into one over housing, mobility, etc.

These events are symptomatic of a more general crisis in the organisation of capitalist exploitation in S.A. and the battles being fought amongst the S.A. ruling class.

APARTHEID MYTHS

The industrial capitalists have opposed apartheid since the nationalist gvt introduced it in the 1950s, for the simple reason that it restricted their supply of labour and their use of this labour for skilled jobs. It never represented the interests of the industrial capitalists, though in the boom period following the war it was an evil they could live with. However, in the 40 years since the war the weight of the African proletariat has increased enormously. In 1955 there were 500 000 black workers, today there are approximately 6½ million, and the archaic organisation of this black proletariat is threatening capital accumulation itself.

Today the programme of the S.A. industrial capitalists is to create a permanent black proletariat with the normal union apparatus, such as exists in Europe, and they wish to bring in black workers to do jobs reserved for whites - at lower rates of course. The system of migrant labour must go. In addition they want to stabilise the townships and are prepared to pay to do this. They wish to allow workers to buy their own houses, to create a black middle class and help the African capitalists by means of cheap loans etc. In other words they wish to forge a class alliance with the rising African capitalists and scrap the official racial alliances which are no longer of any use. An example of their attempts to do this is their creation of the "Urban Foundation" which they set up after the Soweto riots of 1976. It was set up, as its president declared to "foster the emergence of a black middle class and greater stability in our urban societies." Since its creation it has provided loans for such things as the electrification of Soweto and the con-

struction of schools and hospitals in the townships. It has also attempted, unsuccessfully to persuade the gvt to allow Africans to own land in the townships.

In the longer term this programme means sharing power with the black majority and this they are prepared to do. This is shown by the support of the mining houses, for example, for the liberal "Progressive" party. They wish to do these things which entail abolishing apartheid because in the longer term it is the only way their profits can be secured. This, of course, is also the opinion of the American & European capitalists who own approximately 1/3 of the capital invested there.

The overall interests of the western bloc require such a change. South Africa is vital to the strategic interests of US imperialism (astride one of the world's main shipping lanes and with a virtual monopoly of certain strategic minerals). The stabilisation of South Africa, and a modernisation of its system of exploitation is thus needed. But to achieve it will be extremely difficult, without untold social convulsions and the opening of the possibility of increasing Russian influence. The situation in South Africa is most likely to "mark time" until a world war, or proletarian revolution.



Goldminers - already having to strike against the unions to fight for their interests

The nationalist government is utterly unable to carry through such a programme, though it realises, since it controls 55% of the economy, that change is necessary. Recent years have seen it allying itself with the industrial capitalists more openly through such measures as its support for the creation of black trade unions, turning a blind eye to violations of its labour laws and siding with the mine bosses against the white miners when they struck to prevent black worker advancement. Its attempts to defuse the situation have finally crystallised in the ridiculous constitutional changes which came into effect in September and fool no one.

THE FUTURE

The S.African working class who number 8 million are the biggest industrial proletariat in Africa and will be crucial in the future struggles for communism. The present divisions in the working class are rooted in the way capitalism has developed in the country and are continually being exploited by the bosses to prevent workers understanding their position in class terms. Objectively white workers have far more in common with their black class brothers than with white capitalists. As elsewhere the real divisions in S.A. are class divisions not racial ones. The racial divisions which exist for historical and social reasons are used by the capitalist class when it suits them. It is for this that the Afrikaner nationalists of the present gvt and the African nationalists are preparing. Such a war would involve tremendous bloodshed amongst workers and would not benefit them. Even if the African nationalists came to power and introduced a thoroughgoing system of state capitalism as they propose, benefits for the black workers would be minimal. Workers in Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique have already discovered this.

The class struggle in S.Africa needs to be given political direction in combatting the lies of the Afrikaner and African nationalists and uniting black, brown and white workers in a single struggle for communism. For this it is necessary for communists in S.A. to form a communist organisation to intervene in the future struggles of the workers, and to link up with communists in Europe.

WORKERS VOICE

SOUTH AFRICA IN TURMOIL

THE OTHER MINERS STRIKE

Introduction

Throughout the world the capitalist economic crisis is wreaking havoc on the myths of the post-war period of reconstruction. The myth of the "consumer society" has already bitten the dust in the advanced capitalist metropolises. But the myth of economic development has also crumbled, and nowhere more so than in the partly industrialised peripheral areas of capitalism - in Brazil, in Iran and in South Africa. The class struggle in these areas faces particular problems: so-called "anti-imperialism", as well as ethnic and racial divisions, and the minority nature of the proletariat. Communists cannot shrug off these problems and argue that their solution is automatically found on the great day that the proletariat of the capitalist heartlands moves. The beginnings of the proletarian revolution are quite conceivable in the countries of the semi-developed periphery. Communists must therefore attack constantly the nationalist and leftist illusions which largely dominate political existence there, and show concretely what a communist minority would do in such areas.

The case of South Africa is particularly compelling. Lately huge social upheavals, with a large proletarian admixture, have occurred against a backdrop of severe economic crisis. The following article elaborates the revolutionary position on these events.



The last two months have seen a fresh explosion of violence in South Africa. This has occurred on three separate fronts. Firstly the election of coloured (mixed race) and Indian deputies for the new parliamentary chambers, secondly resistance to rises in rent and transport costs in the African townships, and thirdly a strike by black mineworkers. The elections have led to over a thousand arrests and detentions. The riots in the townships, which continue as we go to press, have so far led to 85 deaths and hundreds of injured, and the strike in the gold mines led to the deaths of 9 striking miners and 500 seriously hurt. There are now an estimated 2 million unemployed and the steady fall in the price of gold is causing balance of payments problems. In addition the country is saddled with vast military expenditure financing its war in Namibia which costs £600 million annually, and supporting guerrilla movements in Angola, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

All these events have a common cause whose root springs from the capitalist economic crisis and the pressures which capitalist development is itself exerting on the out-moded organisation of exploitation which exists in the country.

THE ELECTIONS

The government is imposing a new constitution on the country. Instead of the previous whites only parliament, a new 3 chamber parliament has been set up; one chamber for whites (178 seats), one for coloureds (85 seats) and one for Indians (45 seats). The coloured and Indian chambers have no real power, and the black majority, who number 19 million and constitute 75% of the population is totally excluded from the new set up. The new constitution is in reality a crude attempt by the Gvt to

recruit the coloured and Indian populations as allies against the black majority, and the majority of the coloured and Indian people realise this. During the elections a successful multi-racial boycott campaign was conducted, which, despite beatings and imprisonment of its leaders led to abysmally low polls: - 18% and 16% of those eligible to vote voted in the coloured and Indian elections respectively.

What was missing in this campaign was a communist presence. The task of revolutionaries would have been to have supported the campaign for a boycott of the elections, and to have combined this with an attack on parliamentary cretinism in general (see the article in this paper on Democracy and Communism) aimed at the Indian and coloured workers. Instead the campaign has been recuperated by the Indian and coloured bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie in their campaign for a "more democratic" system of exploitation.

THE TOWNSHIPS

The situation in the townships has again become critical for the Gvt. These townships are supposed, in apartheid theory, to provide temporary accommodation for black migrant workers who are temporarily selling their labour power in the industrial centres. In reality these are enormous cities with permanent populations. Soweto alone has a population of over 1½ million, and these cities cannot be run without the cooperation of the people who live in them. Over the last 10 years the Gvt has been attempting to set up elected bodies to help run these townships, but with little success. Often they have even failed to find candidates to stand for election and the poll has been under 1%. The blacks who enter the management structure of the townships are seen as traitors.

The costs of running these cities, however, continues to rise and the workers living there have to foot the bill. At the same time, in common with workers worldwide, their wages are being held down. The latest round of rent, tax and transport rises detonated a new explosion of resistance in the townships of the Witwatersrand industrial area. The immediate targets of resentment were members of the town councils and black policemen many of whom were killed by demonstrators. The government minister in charge of the townships, attempting to clean up S.A.'s public image, tried to visit the townships himself and calm things down but was forced to retreat by helicopter. For the first time ever the police have had to call in the army to maintain order in the townships. But the weakness of this spontaneous movement was seen in the separation of its aims from those of the miners. The indigenous black proletariat of South Africa has largely abandoned work in the mines for less dangerous work in the factories and service industries which are better paid. Miners, often from Mozambique, Lesotho etc, form a sub-proletariat. Again the lack of a communist force, capable of formulating demands and strategy to link the separate struggles, was cruelly exposed.

THE MINERS STRIKE

Black miners are mostly migrant workers recruited from the so called "homelands" and the neighbouring states. There are approximately 400 000 migrant workers in the gold mines

alone. They are recruited for fixed contracts usually annual, then sent home. They work 6 and often 7 days a week and live in appalling conditions in the mine compounds. Rates of pay are extremely low - approx £30 per week. Miners were demanding a 25% rise. Their union, the newly formed NUM, had taken the dispute through the elaborate official machinery of industrial councils and conciliation boards and the strike was official. After only one day the bosses increased their offer from 14 to 16% and the union called off the strike. The mine owners were delighted at the role of the union and Anglo-American, which led the way in fostering the black 'National Union of Mineworkers' urged other mining houses to follow their lead and recognise the union. Many workers, however, were not satisfied at this settlement and in addition demanded guaranteed rights to employment since on returning from visits to their families workers often find they have been replaced by fresh recruits. In response to the refusal of many thousands of miners to return to work the bosses called in the police who shot 9 miners dead and wounded 450 most of whom had to be admitted to hospital. In explaining this the bosses used exactly the same words as Thatcher & Co use here. The police were, "protecting miners right to work" and the trouble was "caused by intimidators!"

The role of the National Union of Miners in this strike should be a salutary lesson. Concerned with gaining negotiating and recruitment rights, it acted as a force controlling the explosion of class hatred, a role which the more far-sighted bosses see it performing more widely in the future. This clearly re-enforces our position that, irrespective of whether they are integrated into the state or not, unions today act everywhere in the interests of controlling the class struggle and deflecting it

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