

WORKERS VOICE

COMMUNIST
WORKERS
ORGANISATION

CONTENTS

TUC assault on the workers.....2	Review: Nicaragua.....6
Hillsborough agreement.....2	Bhopal - One year on.....7
The Pseudo-socialism of Sinn Fein.3	Steelworkers strike.....8
1945 New Imperialist Order.....4	

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THE CRISIS OF THE LEFT

Is it a crisis for revolutionaries ?

With 4 millions unemployed (as a minimum), with massive cuts in social services, decaying roads and buildings, and with output from manufacturing industry down 10% on 1979 (the year Thatcher came to power) it is obvious that the Tories have signally failed to solve the chronic crisis of British capitalism. And as the miners picket lines and the urban resistance in Brixton, Handsworth and Tottenham all so recently showed they will need to invest more and more in the material means to maintain class rule in Britain. Given this situation it is perhaps mystifying why the Labour Party, the TUC and the other forces of the Left, of the so-called Labour Movement in Britain have not been able to benefit from this enormous attack on the working class. It is surprising that they have perhaps not sought to cash in on the unpopularity of the government to win back the support of a class which first fought against them in the "winter of discontent" of 1979 and then electorally deserted them in massive numbers.

Instead we have seen the opposite with the Labour Party launching into a bitter internecine dispute with the Trotskyist entrists of the Militant tendency, the TUC split between the "new realism" of Hammonds EPTU and the "socialist" posturing of Scargill's NUM and on the fringes of all this we have had the splits in the Communist Party of Great Britain (producing two rival newspapers) and the Workers Revolutionary Party (presently producing none at all). Even groups which have remained untouched by major crises (like the Socialist Workers Party) have lost some of their long-time activists.

Genuine communists will, however, shed no tears over the political debacle of the Left because when we talk of the "Left" we are today talking not of the forces of the proletariat, however much they aim their political appeal towards the working class, but of the left-wing of the forces of the bourgeoisie. Let us explain...

THE LEFT WING OF CAPITALISM

The central unifying feature of the the whole Left is their belief that there exists a "Labour Movement" which represents the working class and it is to this that all political activity must be addressed. In fact this fundamental myth is essential to the peculiarly successful domination of bourgeois ideology over the working class in Britain. Unlike in other European countries the trades unions were not formed by socialist parties. It was the other way round. The British trades unions at the beginning of this century created a party in their own image i.e. one which would defend the legal existence of trades unions in the capitalist parliament but which never claimed to be socialist. As marxists are well aware, the trades union struggle of the working class has never been anything but a defensive struggle of the working class and is one which is completely within the framework of capitalism. As Marx wrote over a hundred years ago the problem for communists is to transform the trades union slogan of "a fair days pay for a fair days work" into the communist slogan of "abolition of the wages system". In our era the Labour Party and the trades unions which set it up have no interest in going beyond the trades union struggle so that the concept of a "labour Movement" is in fact based on the continued existence of capitalism. Some of Labour's hangers-on, both inside and outside

the Labour Party, would agree with this but would simply dismiss it as the fault of reformists within the Labour Movement, which, for them, whatever its weaknesses, is the movement of the working class.

The idea that Labour Party is the working class party is precisely the image capitalism wants to give it because its role in the system is to act as the instrument for drawing the working class into electoral participation. Yet the Labour Party has only a dubious claim to have been a working class party in any sense. From the beginning it was dominated by petty bourgeois individuals in loose groups like the Fabians who saw it as an instrument for introducing a greater degree of control over not the anarchy of capitalist production but the untamed spirits of the working class. It is no accident that leading Fabians hailed the ultimate versions of state control of the labour force, Fascism and Stalinism, as "new civilisations" worthy of imitation. Reformism of this type isn't an expression of the politics of "the possible" but of fear of a genuine, independent movement of the working class. The Labour Party's reformism and its favouring of state intervention are therefore entirely consistent with its role in containing class anger when it threatens to break out of the framework of capitalist relations. It was Labour's failure to carry out this function for the bourgeoisie in January 1979 which led to its removal from power by the bourgeoisie and to a new ruling class strategy which involved a conscious campaign of directly undermining the British working class' capacity to struggle. This campaign, first announced in the Ridley Plan of 1978 [For an analysis, see Communist Review 2], has continued to the present-day and consists of forcing the working class to pay for the restructuring of British capitalism through massive unemployment, speed-ups and lower real wage levels. The Labour Party as the left wing party of British capital has been unable to do what its hangers-on have demanded, and lead resistance to these attacks, since it accepts their fundamental premise - to make British capitalism more competitive. Indeed it has underlined its real role by acting as a left-wing echo of the Tories. Instead of defending the miners Kinnock joined the chorus for a ballot (aimed at stopping the strike) and attacked the pickets when they fought with the police. Workers shouldn't be surprised at Labour's defence of the forces of the State. Since 1945 for every time the Tories have used the Army to break strikes Labour has done it six times! And of course the Labour Party and TUC's ultimate defence of the State was seen not only in the World Wars, where they proved their patriotism by issuing propaganda for British imperialism and disciplining the work-force by entering no-strike agreements, but also in the Falklands War where:

"COHSE called off their industrial action in the hospitals for a week as a 'mark of respect for the dead'. The TGWU called off a national dock strike ... to aid the war effort. The NUS encouraged seamen to volunteer for active war service and jingoistically called for the Tories to 'finish the job quickly.'" [Workers Voice 8 p.5.]

The Labour Party's criticism of the Tories at the time was confined to saying that they hadn't sent warships early enough, whilst their most left-wing elements like Benn spouted

pacifist phrases and illusions about UN negotiations.

Even in regard to the Welfare State set up by the 1945-51 Labour Government and which stands in folk memory as definitive proof of Labour's working class credential, Kinnock has already announced that many of the present Tory attacks will not be repealed by a future Labour Government. Labour has long since abandoned even its state capitalist programme. Today it presents itself as an alternative movement for the mixed economy. Clause 4 about nationalising the commanding heights of the economy - which is not the same as socialising the economy - has long been relegated to the Transport House museum - a fact which opens up space for the growth of the more dedicated state capitalists of the Left ...

LABOUR'S "WAR" AGAINST MILITANT

First amongst these is undoubtedly the Revolutionary Socialist League which masquerades under the name of the Militant Tendency. It is one of the most orthodox of Trotskyist groups. They have carried out all Trotsky's prescriptions to the letter: by accepting that Russia is not state capitalist but a 'de-generated workers' state', by following his policy of entryism into the mass parties of Social Democracy and by seeing the crisis of the proletarian movement since the 1920's as nothing but a "crisis of leadership". [For an elaboration of these ideas see "The Origins of Trotskyism" in Revolutionary Perspectives 22.] In actual fact the crisis of the working class is a crisis of consciousness and not simply a crisis of leadership. After sixty years of counter-revolution the working class is now in a position to draw the lessons of its defeats and its present struggles in all countries are part of the long road which will take it to a new consciousness of its aims as a class, during the course of which it will forge anew a communist leadership. Militant, on the other hand, is part of the very counter-revolution which seeks to prevent this revival. Not only does it sully the name of socialism by identifying it with state control of the capitalist economy (for them a bit of workers' control is all the USSR lacks to make it socialist) but it also allows the bourgeoisie to equate "socialism" and "socialists" with dishonesty since Militant doesn't campaign on its real politics but for "a return of a Labour government committed to socialist policies". But socialism isn't just about planning (or every capitalist state today would in this sense be socialist), it is about the abolition of wage-labour and the destruction of capitalism as power alien to the working class. All the Militant tendency seeks to do is to act as the managers, the new bureaucratic ruling class of an even more controlled state capitalism in Britain. How they would act on behalf of the working class we saw in Liverpool when Council workers were sacked [see WV25] in the name of "socialism".

SPLITS ON THE LEFT

What the present crisis in the Labour Party shows is the fundamentally anti-working class nature of that party, whatever faction its members belong to. The attitude of the Communist Party of Great Britain (both halves) and the WRP (both halves), despite their occasional hesitation, is that the single most important thing for the working class is the Labour

The Latest Attack of the TUC

As we wrote in *Workers Voice* 24 the miners' strike was not "just another strike". "It was an important barometer of the direction the class struggle will take in Britain in the immediate future ... The miners' strike was an attempt to halt a successful bourgeois offensive which has been going on in Britain for 6 years ... It failed." Since the end of the strike this perspective has been almost daily confirmed. Despite long and militant strikes at the Atlas Works of Sheffield Forgemasters [see back page] and at the Silenight factory at Barnoldswick; despite such class conscious actions as those of the miners at Silverwood colliery [near Rotherham] who, after achieving a record coal output in December in order to get the jobs of sacked comrades back, immediately went on strike when the NCB reneged on the deal [using their bonus earnings to pay for a few days strike]; despite the depth of class anger against the present government as seen in wildcat strikes in the pits and mini-revolts in the inner cities, the offensive of the ruling class continues.

Latest evidence of this is that statistically the last 9 months of 1984 saw the fewest number of strike days lost for any similar period since World War Two. At the same time the anger of the class has taken another route, of a more negative, individualistic character. Having failed in its collective fight it has now taken the Eastern Europe road of massive absenteeism which is now also at its highest level since World War Two. And just as in Eastern Europe - where the unions blatantly play the role of policemen of the class struggle as an arm of the state - the unions in Britain are seeking an even more integrated role in the state apparatus.

As harbinger of this the TUC quietly released on Boxing Day its proposals for changing the *Tory Industrial Relations Act* [the Tebbit Bill of 1982]. As we wrote in *Workers Voice* 7, TUC opposition to the Tebbit Bill was due to the fact that "if the unions stay within the law, and the class struggle is made illegal, the unions won't be able to control it. They will

become increasingly irrelevant. If the working class struggles outside of the unions and against the law then it will tend to struggle outside of all ideological constraints and the ruling class will be forced to resort more and more to naked force."

And as far as the TUC was concerned this is just what happened in the miners' strike as pickets fought with police. Indeed, it was only the skill of NUM leaders which kept the struggle within the ideological constraints of the ruling class [see *Workers Voice* 18, 19, 20 and 21]. The latest document of the TUC is just one more blow in the bourgeoisie's campaign against the ability of the working class to resist more exploitation and oppression. In fact it will make striking even more difficult than the Tory laws. Whereas the law at present does not demand a ballot before a strike can begin it does allow anybody who claims their interests to be damaged by a strike to claim damages in the courts. The TUC wants to go two steps better than that. It wants to bring in a TUC procedure which forces pre-strike ballots on all workers and if one isn't held before a strike any single worker will have the right to make a complaint against the strike in a TUC-run court. In addition, although the document calls in mealy-mouthed fashion for picketing outside the immediate workplace to be made legal, it does nothing to attack the present law's central thrust which defines solidarity strikes with other workers both at home and abroad as political strikes [yet the dockers' strike in the summer of '84 highlighted that all strikes are explicitly or implicitly political] and the blacking of any particular firm's products as all unlawful.

Running through the whole document is the insidious thread of the secret ballot. Secret ballots are scattered like confetti over a shotgun wedding between the "new realism" of the TUC and the rapacious Tory Government. Like the Tories, the TUC and Labour Party [remember Kinnock's calls during the miners' strike?] accept that a secret ballot is an excellent instrument for class peace. The bourgeoisie,

which for a century shot, transported and imprisoned workers to stop them voting, has now discovered its usefulness to undermine a collective struggle by the working class. Instead of an open vote in a mass meeting surrounded by the collective solidarity of their comrades, secret ballots are a perfect weapon to demoralise workers since they are carried out on an individual basis with each worker prey to the influence of all the 'private' problems of present-day capitalism such as hire purchase repayments, mortgages and other household bills. In the fine calculation between going on strike and risking massive personal loss [a fact daily underlined by Fleet St. with its tales of £6,000 per man debts for miners] and staying at home with a slightly reduced living standard, the secret ballot tips the scale towards individual rather than class solutions. This the TUC has learned well and this it recognises gives the unions more control in any strike to turn it on to the path of negotiation and class compromise.

That the TUC should reflect the physical and ideological campaign against the working class should come as no surprise to any thinking worker. In 1926 when offered the choice by Tory Prime Minister Baldwin of carrying through the General Strike and allowing the working masses to take control of their own destiny or of "saving the country" they rallied, as they had in 1914 and were to do in 1939, to "defence of the realm". These are just the most obvious acts of a daily activity by the unions in the interests of the British capitalist state which has led them and their collective agency, the TUC, to restrict the class struggle for the sake of making "UK Enterprises" more competitive on the world market. This is why they have played their role in cajoling workers into accepting redundancies, lower wages and cuts in the benefits which British capitalism has hitherto allowed. And this is why they have to be swept away along with the capitalist masters they so faithfully serve. If the TUC document is implemented it will only serve to open the eyes of workers as to which side the trade unions represent in the next round of mass class struggle in Britain.

ULSTER AFTER THE HILLSBOROUGH ACCORDS

During November 1985 the governments of Eire and the UK signed what has been described by capitalist politicians and the bourgeois media circus alike as "the most radical Anglo-Irish accord since partition", offering "a historical opportunity for progress towards peace".

The culmination of over a year's protracted negotiation, the Agreement endorses a 'consultative role' for the South in the affairs of the North through an Intergovernmental Conference and a permanent Secretariat; support for devolved government in Ulster by 'power-sharing'; a security programme designed to improve the image of the RUC, UDR and the Northern judicial system, as well as "enhancing" security co-operation generally. While (as expected) the Unionists, Fianna Fail and Sinn Féin rejected the Agreement, it won instant approval from the main British political parties, widespread international acclaim from the bourgeoisie to the EEC, and Western imperialism in general; and a pledge of US aid to an estimated sum of at least £350 million.

Although the Communist Party of Ireland condemned the deal for proposing international recognition of partition and ignoring the "key necessity (!) of a British declaration of intent to withdraw from Ireland", the Workers' Party welcomed the accord but regretted the absence of, among other artificial dressings, a bill of rights for the North! The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (with just under half of its members from Northern Ireland) has yet to make an official comment - it adopted a position of not making any comments on constitutional developments after the failure of the "back to work" march which followed the UWC strike in 1974.

THE COMMUNIST ANALYSIS

Let us state straightaway that not only does the accord offer nothing for the working class in Ulster, but also its content is little

more than a highly orchestrated capitalist PR job; there is nothing truly new in it with the possible exception of a more explicit expression of the government's wish to "settle the conflict". And with particular regard to the "institutionalised recognition" of Eire's right to make proposals in relation to legislation and the form of government in Ulster, as Haughey, leader of Fianna Fail says, "It is only a mechanism which was already there" [*Irish Times* 16.11.85].

To really understand the meaning of the Anglo-Irish deal it is necessary to examine the real reasons behind the latest attempt by Western imperialism to stabilise the situation in the North. With the complete failure of the Northern Ireland Assembly to achieve any sort of bourgeois-democratic normality, the growing financial drain on Britain's resources, sustained support for political Sinn Féin in the North, continuing international criticisms about Britain's presence in Ireland and the possibility of acquiring another Falklands factor-type vote winning card, Thatcher has pressed ahead with the initiative to "end violence and offer people an opportunity to proceed in a democratic way", and aims to link it up with the issue of law and order (on the mainland) generally.

Unionist opposition is planned in three stages. The current one, involving constitutional protests and forced referendum; stage two would involve "passive resistance", and the third the (unlikely) prospect of generalised violence and killings. However, Thatcher's Unionist critics are (unlike 1974) dealing with a strong government and a united Parliament. The Loyalists are divided within themselves, especially between politicians and para-militaries. The British state has drawn up extensive contingency plans and preparations have been made to contain trouble. Crucially, power supplies will be secured and there is confidence that the Loyalist "success" of

1974 will not be repeated. So the British government's chances of riding the Unionist storm are much better than in 1974. Lessons have been learned and Parliament's support for Thatcher will be very strong.



ANNOUNCEMENT

Starting from this issue we are increasing the periodicity of *Workers Voice* which will now appear every 6 weeks as a step towards a more regular issue in future. In order to help finance this we have had to put up the price to 30p.

Subscription rates will now be as follows:

Workers Voice: £3.00 per year
[post paid]

WV plus our theoretical journals [*Communist Review* & *Revolutionary Perspectives*]: £5.00 per year [£6 outside Britain]

A supporters' subscription remains £10.00 per year.

All sums should be made payable to the CWO and sent to: P.O. Box 145, Head Post Office, GLASGOW; or: BM BOX CWO, LONDON, WC1 3XX

SINN FEIN : SOCIALIST OR CAPITALIST ?

Recent months have witnessed a growing confrontation between the British government and militant Ulster Loyalism. In the province mass demonstrations, threats of para-military violence etc. are once again the order of the day. This campaign however is to be centred around a series of forced by-elections in Unionist held constituencies, a strategy billed as an unofficial referendum to prove that "Ulster Says No!" to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. (For a communist analysis see the editorial of this issue.)

One side-effect of the Unionist tactic has been a renewed propaganda barrage from the supposed opposite of the political spectrum, Provisional Sinn Fein, paralleling a fresh gun and bomb offensive by their "military-wing" the IRA. Sinn Fein will contest the four most vulnerable seats (against the emotive background of an INLA hunger strike), peddling themselves in the language of pseudo-socialism as the champions of Irish 'national-liberation' with "an Armalite in one hand, and a ballot box in the other."

The international publicity their electoral success has brought in recent years, coupled with the "critical" support they continue to enjoy from the British left mean that it has again become a political priority for communists to expose the bourgeois nature of Sinn Fein's politics, as well as their reactionary role both in Ireland and elsewhere.

THE ROOTS OF PROVO "SOCIALISM"

The history of the Provisional IRA/Sinn Fein movement dates back to their split with the "extreme socialist" (according to the Provos) Official IRA in 1970 under the pressure of growing opportunities for a Republican intervention in the Catholic ghettos. The splitters adopted reactionary corporatist ideology as the basis of their economic and social policy and openly announced a "socialist" outlook which was compatible with "our Irish and Christian values":

However, the political contradictions of the Provos were hardly visible when, as in the early years, the military strategy was so clearly in the ascendant within the movement. This was the period of escalating violence in Ulster, when the IRA could apparently strike at will and the Republican leadership still imagined that a military victory was on the agenda.

The element advocating a 'political approach' only came to prominence when the British state managed to limit IRA activities to a sporadic (if relatively efficient) terrorist campaign, with "acceptable" casualties and troop numbers. Ofcourse their passage to leadership was also the product of the generally deteriorating economic situation in the 1970s and '80s which allowed them to exploit the genuine anger of

ULSTER continued from p. 2

Similarly, for FitzGerald the accord offers the chance to deflect attention from the ailing Eire economy. His coalition government (with the Irish Labour Party) is very unpopular with the South's voters and is set for defeat in the next general election. Before the Agreement was signed the opposition Fianna Fail Party was ahead in an opinion poll by a full 19 points. While the latest poll this lead has disappeared, over the longterm the Agreement is unlikely to provide the miracle needed to restore FitzGerald's electoral prospects.

Indeed, the Accord allows Haughey's opposition to play the "green card" to boost its image as the more authentic voice of traditional Irish nationalism.

More importantly perhaps, the failure of conventional politicians to accommodate the Northern Catholics' grievances has created a vacuum for Provisional Sinn Fein's combination of "radical" politics and military force. Sinn Fein's partial success in the North threatens to repeat itself in the South where there is a similar constituency of young(non) voters disaffected with the established parties.

Hence FitzGerald's (and Thatcher's) desire to shore-up the fortunes of the SDLP and neutralise the possibility of any Sinn Fein

the young Catholic unemployed in particular. Along with other Republican groups like the INLA and the Workers' Party (formally the Official IRA) Sinn Fein has increasingly paid lip service to state capitalist solutions to the crisis, and union schemes to artificially reduce unemployment, while always relating these to the "anti-imperialist struggle". In the last analysis the new-found socialist rhetoric of Sinn Fein is simply an attempt to embarrass the British state for its chronic political and economic failures in Ulster.

THE BANKRUPTCY OF SINN FEIN

While communists do not criticise Sinn Fein by using the same method as the bourgeois left, it is true that the group's failure to be consistent even when it comes to reformist demands is one of the clearest indications of how thin its 'veneer of "socialism" really is.

The activity of political Sinn Fein in the North centres around what would be considered no more than routine constituency work in Great Britain - basically offering advice and making representations to the various institutions of the welfare state. This represents simply Sinn Fein 'realpolitik' in working class areas which have become increasingly dependent upon state benefits (the UDA, who run similar schemes are rarely described as "socialist"!)). At the same time, the Republicans work at the constitutional level to integrate Northern Ireland into one of the most reactionary states in Western Europe, where even the UK's wholly inadequate welfare provision is absent.

Sinn Fein will not even support the growing bourgeois campaign to de-secularise the Southern state, as was illustrated by their deafening silence during the Republic's 1984 Abortion Referendum.

This is not to mention their support for the IRA's "policing" role in working class districts which has seen the gruesome escalation of punishment beatings, knee-cappings and murders in recent years. "Political offenders" and "petty-criminals" alike are denounced and threatened using the apparatus of Sinn Fein's Republican Press Centres. Meanwhile the IRA supplements its 'traditional' income from extortion rackets in the North and by bank robberies in the South.

Though the British left in general encourage Sinn Fein to modify some of the above "faults", communists have no advice to offer. Rather we point out that "socialist strategies" are only window dressing for the Republican Movement which will be cast off whenever tactics dictate. What communists will denounce is the most essential premise upon which Sinn Fein/IRA politics rest - their claim that nationalism is still relevant to the working class. Articles on Eire in recent issues of Workers Voice* offer a good example of the impossibility of

challenge in the Southern political process. The Republic's accedence to the Agreement on the Suppression of Terrorism (once some symbolic alterations have been made to the North's judicial system, e.g. restructuring of the courts), confirms the ruling bourgeoisie's wish to 'freeze-out' Sinn Fein and further limit IRA activities.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement offers nothing for the working class. Protestant and Catholic, workers will continue to face a capitalist menace whose only interest is to attack the combativity of the workers (however limited) and pacify their response to the economic crisis. By using the Agreement as a tool to whip up nationalist propaganda of both the Republican and Unionist type, the capitalists hope to draw workers into illusory ideological campaigns to distract from their efforts in the class struggle against mounting austerity.

While on the street level cynicism is abundant, the aftermath of the Agreement - Unionist hysteria, the IRA campaign to destroy police stations, the INLA hunger strike against the "super-grass" trails - has already served to accentuate sectarian divisions and divert attention from workers' real interests.

The only socialist solution to the situation in the North is for Irish workers to recognise the necessity of uniting in struggle against the real obstacle to true peace -

national liberation from imperialism in the modern epoch and illustrate the fact that all possible tactical grounds for the working class supporting nationalism have utterly disappeared. In fact the contemporary Irish Republican movement is only unusual in that it does not even represent the interests of the opposing imperialist bloc since the Russians cannot hope to gain from a nationalist victory, but only from continued conflict to drain British resources. In reality the movement represents only the interests of its petty-bourgeois would-be rulers of a united Irish capitalism, and can only be successful if the US bloc deems success a necessity.

In the meantime, Sinn Fein plays a reactionary ideological role by dividing worker from worker with outright nationalist poison, just as Protestant para-militaries and all shades of "constitutional" politics in Ulster seek to divert any working class response to growing austerity. This is the role which caused Republican "hero" James Connolly (while still a socialist of sorts) to describe nationalism as:-

"A movement which would lay aside class contentment to gain national ends, so enabling the bourgeoisie to prevent working class expression."

THE INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

The CWO, as a constituent organisation of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party, stands for the creation of the World Communist Party through principled regroupment of revolutionary forces. We stand for working class unity across all national and craft divisions, and against all those forces which seek to distract working class resistance to international capitalist austerity.

Consequently, in Ireland:

- we criticise ruthlessly all the nationalist/sectarian ideologies which grip the working class, like Republicanism and Loyalism, and explain that the problems of all workers are essentially the same, and can only be solved by communist revolution and the establishment of a world-wide system of production for need;

- we support all struggles of whatever section of the working class to defend itself against the economic crisis, and call for their unification and extension across sectarian, localist and craft divisions;

- we support all attempts by the workers to organise for self-defence against the army and para-militaries of all shades, and for their expulsion from working class areas;

- we are absolutely hostile to any element which, however critically, gives support to the IRA or Sinn Fein, since they are carrying out the policy of capitalism - divide and conquer.

* See Workers Voice numbers 24 ("Eire: A State of Dependence.") and 25 ("Eire: Class Struggle V. The 'Economic Miracle'").

capitalism. And as we said over ten years ago in July 1975:

"... in Ulster, as elsewhere, socialists must struggle within the working class for the communist programme as the only hope humanity has of avoiding barbarism as the crisis deepens."

NICARAGUA continued from p6

apparatus from the metropolitan centres. what we have been witnessing in this area is not a "revolution", but the emergence of a more permanent form of domination, a state-capitalist one, which strives to enlist even wider layers of the population for the extortion of surplus value. It is the task of communists to reveal the practical essence of this polity and the ideological form it assumes and not to camouflage and confuse the issues as do the SWP

Unfortunately space precludes us from dealing with the many other misconceptions of this book. The raison d'etre of the SWP and other leftists is the continual perversion of the political and economic doctrine of the communist programme. The fundamentals of the latter are the precious fruit of a long process of theoretical struggle, of an historic tradition encapsulating the concentrated experience of the class and providing a common starting point for groups of the communist left.

By 1945 diplomacy in the old sense of secret alliances and shifting friendships between the great powers had gone for good. In 1945 there was no grand peace conference as at Vienna in 1815 or Versailles in 1919 where the fate of millions was settled with a "scented smile". There was no need for one. In a series of meetings between 1943 and 1945 the two major powers had already divided the world up between themselves. These agreements were no more than the recognition of the existing situation. Thus when Churchill made his proposal of October 1944 to divide up Eastern Europe into spheres of influence on a percentage basis (the USSR to get 90% of Rumania, 75% control in Bulgaria, 50% control in Hungary and Yugoslavia whilst the West got 90% of Greece) Stalin could readily agree because it satisfied the two main war aims of the Russian state - reparations for the devastation caused by the Germans in Russia and the setting up of a "cordon sanitaire" of governments friendly to Russia along her Western border. In doing so he simply recognised the new realpolitik. As he told Yugoslav Communist Party leaders in 1945

"This war is not as in the past. Whoever occupies a territory imposes on it his own social system as far as his army can reach." [Djilas *Wartime* p.437]

RUSSIA : SOCIALIST OR IMPERIALIST?

But what system was Stalin imposing on Eastern Europe? The October Revolution in Russia had opened up the possibility of a new, communist society for millions in 1917. However with no successful echo anywhere else in the world, despite winning the support of millions of workers throughout the planet the first proletarian power in history was isolated. Within Russia itself the proletariat was decimated by a three year civil war costing 10 millions of lives, mostly through famine and disease. At this time Lenin compared the condition of the Russian working class to that of a man "who has been thrashed within an inch of his life". In such conditions it is not surprising that the lifeblood drained from the Russian revolution. Gradually power slipped from the proletariat in the soviets to the party, and then from the party to a self-perpetuating elite within the party who were already a new ruling class in embryo. Russian workers found that exploitation remained the same when the state replaced the private capitalists as the one "collective capitalist" [Engels]. This was not due to any moral or intellectual failure of the Russian communist leaders but the material working out of the fact that the construction of socialism in one country in isolation is an impossibility. Thus the new ruling class soon turned to the traditional concerns of all capitalist governments - creating the best internal conditions for the accumulation of capital and the best external conditions for defence of the national territory. First came trade deals with Sweden, Great Britain and Germany, closely followed by an attempt at alliance with the social democrats (the so-called united front) who had not only supported imperialist war in every country but had also massacred revolutionary workers in Germany in direct alliance with the Junker military caste. Whilst this was seen by many communists at the time as a necessary retreat or as simply a single mistaken tactic the process did not stop there and as the Communist International was converted into a mere arm of Russian foreign policy the revolutionary elements within it were expelled. By 1934 there was nothing socialist about Stalin's new order. The Soviet Union had already (in 1926) entered the League of Nations (which Lenin had denounced as "a den of robbers") but its first full performance in the concert of European powers was the "Popular Front" which was announced at the 7th Comintern Congress.

PREPARATIONS FOR IMPERIALIST WAR

The Popular Front was qualitatively different from the United Front. As we wrote in *Workers Voice* 21

"No longer was it talk of a mistaken policy to try and spread the revolution or a mistaken policy to defend Russia by postponing its spread; now the policy was explicitly the abandonment of proletarian revolution, and the defence of the bourgeois state, along with an open military alliance with imperialism. As Deutscher says in *Stalin*, "The defence of democracy (the adjective bourgeois was discreetly dropped) against fascism was declared to be the supreme task of labour". [p.412]"

1945 : A NEW IMPERIALISM

PART TWO:

IN THE EAST

As we predicted in the first part of this article the results of the Geneva Summit between Gorbachov and Reagan were rather less than small. Despite the ballyhoo that has greeted the supposed conversion of Reagan from cold warrior to conciliator, or places "hopes" in the new boss of the Kremlin, what has driven the USA and the USSR to the conference table is the threat posed to their economic and social stability by the world capitalist crisis. As we wrote in *Workers Voice* 25 the summit is a first step to reduce the massive expenditure in arms "which is crippling these economies (the USSR badly needs investment in agriculture, the USA has to attempt to cut its budget deficit)". In fact the relations between the two super-powers has since 1945 always been dominated by economic considerations. In the first part of this article we charted the growth, in the Western-dominated part of the planet, of the US multi-nationals as the fruits of the USA's victory in 1945. In this part of the article we not only demonstrate the equally imperialist nature of the USSR within its bloc whatever "socialist" labels it adopts, but analyse the economic relations which have governed the international manoeuvres of the USA and USSR.

By declaring a class difference between the fascist and democratic bourgeoisie Stalin was preparing the way for an alliance with the Western democracies in the war against Hitler which was clearly in the offing. The first fruits of this were seen in Spain where the Russian secret police liquidated revolutionaries whilst the Spanish Communist Party grew dramatically amongst the petty bourgeoisie by assuring them that their property was safe. However as a diplomatic strategy the Popular Front was a total failure since Britain and France were more interested in getting Hitler to attack Russia - a fact which became obvious at Munich in 1938. This was the background to the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in the summer of 1939. Defence of "socialism in one country" now meant imperialist annexations. Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Finland were all in turn attacked and defeated by the Red Army in alliance with Hitler's Wehrmacht.

Yet even this barbarity was not enough to convince some that Russia was no longer a proletarian state. Take, for example, the confusions of Trotsky who, in 1939 could tell us that "the politics of Moscow, taken as a whole, retains its reactionary character" but still thought that "the invasion of Poland by the Red Army should ... result in the abolition of private capitalist property, so as thus to bring the regime of the occupied territories into accord with the regime of the USSR" [The USSR in the War] And Trotsky thus concludes that the "reactionary" policy has had a "progressive" result. AS we have shown elsewhere [see *Revolutionary Perspectives* 22] the root of Trotsky's error lies in his failure to see that nationalisation of the means of production doesn't alter the capitalist character of the relations of production. This prevents all Trotskyists today from understanding the capitalist nature of Russian imperialism. Instead they resort to all kinds of subjective formulae (like the "degenerated workers state" concoction) in an attempt to extricate themselves from the problem. But the method to understand such societies is already present in Marxism and takes its lead from Engels over a hundred years ago

"Neither the conversion into joint-stock companies nor into state property deprives the productive forces of their character as capital...The modern state whatever its form, is an essentially capitalist machine; it is the state of the capitalists, the ideal collective body of all the capitalists. The more productive forces it takes over as its property, the more it becomes the real collective body of all the capitalists, the more citizens it exploits. The workers remain wage-earners, proletarians. the capitalist relationship isn't abolished; it is rather pushed to an extreme..." (Anti-Duhring pp 329-330)

The specific form of property may not be directly heritable amongst the Soviet elite but this does not alter its class character as a ruling class. Its members enjoy a lifestyle unknown to those they rule with state cars, dachas in the country, foreign travel and the

right to go to the head of every queue. Lenin's idea that a state official's wage should equal that of the average worker died with him. And the perks of the bureaucracy are paid for from the very same surplus value that is extracted from Western workers to pay for the high lifestyle of their bosses. What is common to both societies is the alienation of the bulk of the social product to a minority class which dispenses with it as it sees fit without control by the class that creates that wealth. Indeed at the very time when Trotsky was sinking deeper into the mire of a workers state not run by workers Stalin was widening class differences in response to the need for rearmament of the Red Army. Just as Western governments brought in cuts in the 30s so too did Stalin. Between 1938 and 1940 insurance benefits were cut, maternity leave was reduced from 112 to 70 days and fees were introduced for children in higher forms in the secondary schools (see A. Nove *An Economic History of the USSR* p.263)

"THE BIG THREE"

Stalin clearly thought that Russia was safe for some time once Germany was at war with Britain and France in September 1939. As part of the Nazi-Soviet Pact the USSR delivered grain to Germany and was still doing so when Hitler suddenly attacked the USSR in June 1941. Stalin now entered a new marriage of convenience with Britain and (after Pearl Harbor) the USA under the banner of "defence of democracy against" fascism". The Popular Front idea was vindicated at last and as a sop to his new friends Stalin dissolved the Comintern. Its departure could hardly have been lamented by revolutionaries since it acted against the interests of world revolution for nearly two decades. Russia no longer needed two foreign ministries and 1943 was the year in which the Allies got down to carving up the planet.

As the "liberating" Red Army pillaged and raped its way towards Berlin (as a quid pro quo for the Wehrmacht's similar "civilising mission" in Russia in 1941-2) Stalin was already entering into deals about reparations from Germany and its allies. The US and Britain not only agreed to allow Russia to empty Eastern Germany of plant but also to hand over 15% of the capital equipment of Western Germany. Rumania had to pay reparations of \$300 million (at 1938 prices), half of which was to be in petroleum products, plus 100,000 wagon-loads of cereal, the Ploesti oil refineries and 20% of the fixed capital of the textile and metallurgical industries. Hungary's industrial capital, which produced only a third of her exports was also plundered thus leaving it as an agricultural colony, totally dependent on the USSR for its industrial goods. Similar exactions went on not only elsewhere in E. Europe but in coal and mineral-rich Manchuria.

ST WORLD ORDER

Such plunder had two aims. The first was to replace the massive amount of plant destroyed when the Germans invaded but the more long-term aim was to reduce Russia's Western neighbours to greater dependence on Russian manufactures. However it was in the actual occupation of territory that Stalin was most interested since he wished to provide Russia with a friendly buffer zone as a cushion against any renewed attack from the west. The alliance with Hitler had given him parts of Poland and Finland as well as the Baltic territories. He now reclaimed all the territory lost by Tsar Nicholas II in the First World War. Needless to say there was to be no right to self-determination for these national minorities since Russification was the order of the day. In the months that followed the end of the Second World War Stalin largely stuck by the percentage agreement he had made with Churchill. Thus not only did he leave the Greek Communist Party to the revenge of a white reaction financed by the CIA in 1947 but he left Tito to go his own way in keeping the Yugoslav economy out of Moscow's clutches. What started the Cold War was the installation of puppet governments in Poland and Czechoslovakia, both previously in the Western orbit.

THE ORIGINS OF THE COLD WAR

Russia's aim of establishing territorial domination in Eastern Europe did not, at first, worry the USA since under Roosevelt the view was that of Secretary of State Stimson that

"...Our respective orbits do not clash geographically and I think that, on the whole, we can keep out of clashes in the future..."

[April 1945 Qu. in D.Yergin *Shattered Peace* p.80]

But the events of the late 40s soon caused the US to consider that it had struck a bad deal. The collapse of the old colonial empires in the Second World War (due in no small part to the US itself as it snapped up British markets in the period 1939-41) was a reflection of the general collapse of Europe's economic base. This economic collapse had created a situation which was full of danger for the US economy. The US productive apparatus, undamaged by bombing and invasion was still geared to a war economy and producing to the full. How could it avoid a slump unless the world, and in particular the Western European economy, picked up enough to provide the US with a market? Added to this was the political consideration that France and Italy had huge Communist parties loyal to Moscow and in a situation of economic chaos it was not unlikely that they too would "go communist" thus removing them behind the barrier of the non-convertible currencies of Eastern Europe. Non-convertibility was in fact the newest form of imperialist protectionism and much more effective than mere tariffs and much cheaper than colonial occupation. Thus whilst the USA has been battering down the walls of imperialist preference in the old empires, ready to flood them with its endless supply of cheap commodities, a new and more threatening system of trade restraint was arising in the East. Thus the so-called Truman doctrine of "containment of communism", although expressed in ideological terms, had its material roots in preventing other areas of the world from being lost to the "free" world market - "free" that is, for domination by US industrial and financial giants.

We have already shown how the economic corollary of the Truman Doctrine operated in Part One of the article. Here we are concerned largely with the role of the USSR which needs non-convertibility as its only economic protection against destruction by its economically more powerful rival. With its low organic composition of capital, its low productivity and an inefficient system of production, it could not hope to compete with the USA other than on military terms. Even here it has to divert twice as much of its national wealth (proportionally) to military expenditure in order to stay in the arms race. This is also why the imperialism of the USSR has to go for

more direct forms of domination than its US rival. Whereas the USA can use its financial muscle to pressurise other states to do its bidding (vide the financial carrot offered to the British if they would support Star Wars) and has an enormous apparatus of banking institutions to control its section of the planet (See Part One) the USSR is not even the most economically advanced of the Eastern European states. This is why physical domination plays a greater part in Russian imperialism and this is why the Red Army installed puppet regimes throughout Eastern Europe. Here Stalin was not simply content to put in the local Communists but any CP First Secretary who objected to the ruinous barter agreements imposed on his country was soon imprisoned and shot (like Kostov (Bulgaria), Slansky (Czechoslovakia) and Rajk (Hungary)).

Since the foundation of Comecon none of the traditional methods of imperialism have been missed by the USSR in Eastern Europe, not even the export of capital,

"Between 1955 and January 1961 economic aid in the form of 2% and 2½% loans ... has been advanced for over 520 industrial and agricultural enterprises in socialist countries."

[*Statesman's Year Book* 1962]

Two per cent interest seems generous but the conditions of this aid were that it can only be used to purchase Soviet goods and the fact that the deal is in roubles means that East European states have to accept a series of bilateral trade deals which favour the USSR. Take for example the situation of Czechoslovakia in 1966-7 when that country was buying Russian oil at a higher price than Russia was selling it in the West. Just to make sure that the Czechs carried on paying for this inflated oil the Czech government was forced to grant the USSR a loan of \$550 millions to ensure that "supplies at favourable prices could continue".

ANTI-IMPERIALISM IN EASTERN EUROPE

Naked imperialism does however have its consequences and these have been seen in the continuing class struggle in the so-called "people's democracies" which have from time to time burst out into mass revolts as in East Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956, and Czechoslovakia in 1968, as well as on a number of occasions in Poland but most notably in 1970, 1976 and 1980. Like the Polish crisis all the struggles were a mixture of proletarian resistance accompanied by reactionary nationalism produced by the exactions of the imperialist centre. Whilst we have analysed the nature of these revolts elsewhere [For Poland see *Workers Voice* Nos. 1,2,5,6, and 13, Hungary *WV5* and East Germany *WV11*], in the context of the relations of the bloc leaders they reveal that the USA also respects the settlement of 1945. Never, not even at the height of the Cold War, has it intervened to defend the cause of "freedom" that its propaganda nominally espouses. Indeed the Polish crisis after 1979 could not have been contained without the willing assistance of the world's bankers who take their cues from the USA. In April 1979 the 15 major Western governments also owed money by Poland bailed out that bankrupt state by deferring repayment of 90% of Poland's \$24 billions of debt and deferred immediate payment of \$2½ billions in interest payments. Even Reagan's famous embargo after Jaruselski's coup was a toothless gesture since it excluded US grain (much to the annoyance of the US' satellites in Europe).

DETENTE

Cooperation over Poland was illustrative of another phase of inter-imperialist relations since the war but which developed from the late Fifties. Various names "peaceful co-existence", "detente" etc. like the Cold War it also had its material roots in economic interests of the "superpowers". For the Soviet Union economic stagnation and the huge cost of diverting resources to keep up in the arms race had become synonymous. Khrushchev's boast of overtaking the USA were dismissed along with their instigator in 1964. At the same time in Washington that executive committee of the multinationals, the US government was in the hands of those who reckoned that

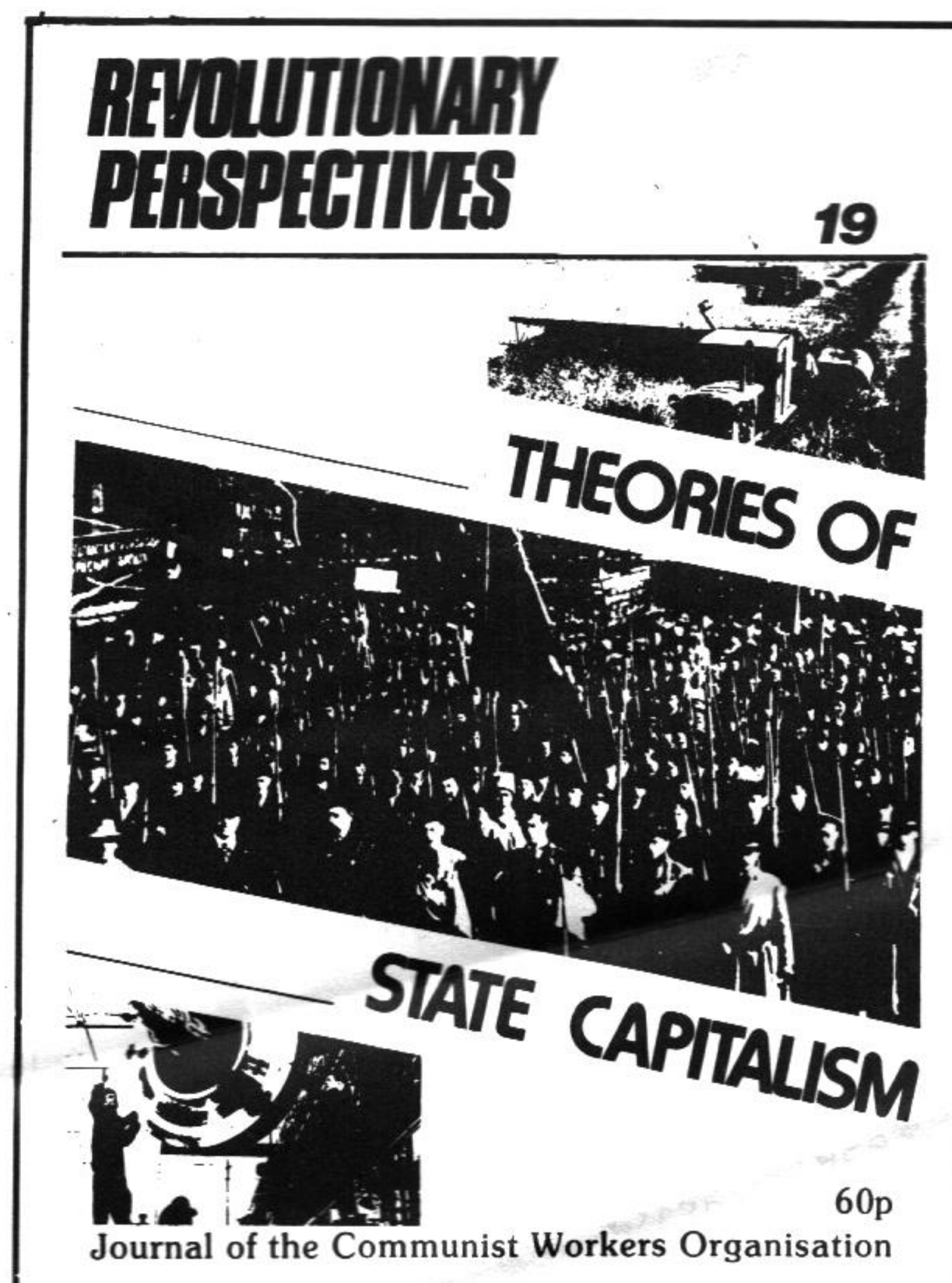
"profits from the Vietnam War had reached the point of diminishing returns when balanced against the awaiting bonanza in East-West cooperation which could not be seriously mined until the US pulled out completely" [C. Levinson *Vodka-Cola* p21]

In addition the first rumbling of the crisis in the US (1971 was not only the year that

Nixon visited Peking and began pulling out of Vietnam, it was also the year when he effectively devalued the dollar). To the giant multinationals a way out of the impending recession had already been signalled by Valletta (the ex-fascist boss of FIAT) who had built Togliattigrad where he got behind the non-convertible currency barrier. Strike-free, cheap, skilled labour linked to Western capital and technology was to be the rockbed of the new era. Since then it has become increasingly complex with a vast number of joint East-West companies being set up to facilitate the transfer of finance, technology and commodities. Today the Western banking system is so dependent on the stability of the Soviet Empire for repayment of an enormous debt overhang [\$100 milliards in 1980] that any serious threat such as that caused by the Polish workers compels the West to protect the Eastern status quo. Poland was not the first to be bailed out. North Korea is bankrupt but has refused to reply to any of the demands from Swiss and US banks to repay \$700 million. A declaration of bankruptcy by either side would it seem be a prelude to a declaration of war and would certainly bring down the banking system.

CONCLUSION

All this economic interdependence does not mean the abandonment of the internecine rivalry which is at the heart of capitalism in its highest stage. The multinational monopolies of the West and the state capitalist monopolies of the East may have a mutual shared interest in economic deals in the capitalist heartlands. Elsewhere, beyond the frontiers of the 1945 deals, the struggle for the planet, like the capitalist crisis itself, proceeds at a more desperate and rapid rate. In Nicaragua and Afghanistan all kinds of massacres are being perpetrated to defend the strategic interests of the imperialist bloc leaders. In these areas the Third, as yet undeclared, world war has already begun. Its generalised version will not however break out until all the palliatives which the world's capitalist leaders, East and west, still believe can cure the crisis have been exhausted. This article shows that the last forty years of peace in the capitalist centres is not the product of any mutually feared destruction in a nuclear war nor even less a result of a new era of enlightened statesmanship. The "settlement" of 1945 left no unsatisfied great power seeking to overturn it (unlike in 1919 when the Treaty of Versailles was forced on Germany). Both the USSR and the USA have been able to benefit from their division of Europe and have largely deflected the worst effects of the crisis onto their satellites there. However as the Soviet Union found in Poland this not only risks the collapse of the satellite state in bankruptcy but also provokes more intense class struggle. As the crisis gnaws its way towards the capitalist heartlands the whole delicate structure created in 1945 is becoming more and more precarious.



A fuller explanation of our views on state capitalism can be found in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 19. Available from the group address.

NICARAGUA

THE REVOLUTION HAS YET TO BEGIN

Events which involve the sudden eruption of the masses onto the historical stage, such as the insurrectionary toppling of the Shah of Iran in 1979, or the mobilisation of these masses in a civil war against the Somoza dynasty of Nicaragua that same year, demand the utmost political clarity of revolutionaries. This cannot be achieved outwith a correct theoretical framework. A superficial reading of Gonzalez's study of Nicaragua might concede that his work is of considerable value. A scrutiny that goes beyond the empirical surface will reveal, however, that inspite of pretensions to the contrary the political conclusions that he draws from his investigations are anything but the result of a Marxist method. Not merely the subjective failing of a single individual, this should be understood as the outcome of a methodological frame of reference whose political premises - once the radical veneer is steamed off - are at root fundamentally capitalist.

The "Nicaraguan Revolution" has been hailed by leftist forces throughout the world as a great victory and indeed as an example to be followed by all the oppressed peoples of Central America. Six harsh years of this "revolution", though, have spelt the end of leftist triumphalism, and despite strenuous attempts to maintain a "critical" distance, the position of the SWP remains unambiguous:

"The Nicaraguan Revolution represented a great advance, an example of what a mass movement can achieve and how the apparently impenetrable alliance of military dictatorships serving US interests can be broken." (Gonzalez, p.76)

Contrary to its publicised image, however, the victory of the FSLN and its setting up of a government claiming to represent the interests of the workers and poor peasants was an important victory for capitalism, as the following quote from our newly published "Draft Theses on the Tasks of Communists in the Periphery" seeks to highlight:

"Iran and Nicaragua demonstrate the results of the democratist and liberaloid chatter of bourgeois nationalist forces. In both cases the forces now in power used liberal and democratic programmes against the former dictatorships of Somoza and the Shah in order to create bourgeois regimes which immediately denied the liberties they promised. This was inevitable since, to get themselves on their feet economically, these regimes had to continue squeezing the proletariat and maintaining the poverty of the oppressed masses." (Communist Review 3 p.23)

In rebellion against appalling living and working conditions, the Nicaraguan proletariat had been lead to support first the movement and then the government of the majority fraction

of the bourgeoisie. But inspite of this,

"Imperialism, or rather that state of capitalist relations in their final global period, has not even been scratched; neither has anything changed in the productive relations between the classes in Nicaragua." (CR 3 p.17)

Gonzalez continues with concrete evidence of the "great advance" - "For Nicaraguans themselves, the revolution brought real and immediate improvements in living standards. The literacy campaign virtually eliminated illiteracy...Health provision is vastly improved..." (p.76) As communists we are the first to defend what meagre benefits have been won by the workers and other exploited strata. But in the context of the Sandinista investment in the minimal conditions for a better qualified and healthier labour power, the proletariat is the fatted calf, constantly sacrificed on the altar of capital accumulation. It is not by defending the state which dictates the terms of their exploitation and mobilisation for further war that the workers and rural labourers can uphold their independent interests - (and this is the SWP position: "We defend the Sandinista State to the extent that it represents a step forward for the working class..." p.80) - but only through a deadly struggle to confront and topple that state can their own class autonomy be established. As we state in the "Draft Theses",

"If a state which has emerged from social movements and insurrections is not the proletarian dictatorship it must be a bourgeois state...Even the most radical forces of the "left" of this regime would be concerned with guaranteeing social peace in the name of the democratic "gains" which this state would stand for. And with that, such tendencies would have put themselves on the other side of the class divide." (CR 3 p.21)

From amidst the sea of empiria, only at rare intervals do the SWP make their political stance explicit:

"Our common ground with all socialists, and indeed with all democrats, is that imperialism's attempt to crush Nicaragua must be resisted at every level." (Gonzalez p.75)

But in the "draft Theses" we show that today all factions of the bourgeoisie, no matter how "anti-imperialist", are reactionary, the epoch of tactical alliances having long since gone:

"If the proletariat is still too "immature" to act autonomously any alliance with the "democratic" or "revolutionary" fringes of the bourgeoisie means subordination to that bourgeoisie...The opposing position which maintains that proletarian political organisations can develop revolutionary conditions within the bourgeois state forms takes us back to the gradualist, essentially reformist formulations of the 2nd International and to the worst national communism." (CR 3 p.21)

One of our most salient divergences with leftism is over the nature and function of trade unionism. Referring to the small sector of Nicaragua's unionised workers (the Stalinist federation CAUS and the agricultural workers' ATC) Gonzalez states, "The working class movement, however, did contain organisations with their own traditions and an organised base of their own." (p.48) The "traditions" he is here unwittingly referring to were the limited, sectional and economic struggles of capitalism's progressive era - and here largely confined to the historic heartlands of Europe and North America - traditions that have been transformed into shackles in the present epoch, where not only are unions incapable of defending workers' most immediate interests, but by sabotaging the class struggle from within, have become one of the principal agencies for the enforcement of redundancies and austerity.

Gonzalez continues on the same page,

"The Sandinista trade union organisation the CST, was founded soon after the vict-

ory.. It was appointed by the state to organise the unorganised workers, and to challenge the leadership of the existing organisations. Yet the CST played an ambiguous role. For it was charged with organising and supervising production and with winning the class to the general strategy of Sandinismo."

The only "ambiguous role" is that played by the author's misplaced naivety, as on the next page he goes on to say,

"The unions were to oversee the raising of production and productivity.. to translate the imperatives of national defence into the workplace. But what this meant for the working class in real terms was a reduction of their standard of living."

In spite of the acknowledgement of this fact the SWP remain the last ditch defenders of the unions, whether they be metropolitan or "Third World".

Well worth recording is the fact that despite its minority status, despite its being caught up in the middle of a civil war between two factions of the bourgeoisie, the militant consciousness of the Nicaraguan proletariat was not extinguished, but on the contrary became a component part of a resurgent wave of international class struggle that was gathering pace towards the end of the '70s. Provoked by an FSLN decision to lower wages, January and February of 1980 saw the outbreak of a series of strikes centred on Managua, the most notable of which was a strike of 4,000 building workers and a bitter dispute at the Fabritex factory of that city. Completely missing the significance of these events, Gonzalez gets sidetracked into a discussion of the inter-union wrangle where the CST, mounting an intense campaign against CAUS, acted to stop the Fabritex strike:

"The contradiction was illustrated when a group of workers took over the El Caracol factory in February. The reasons for the takeover were the removal of investment by the bosses and a fall in production. This takeover won immediate government approval - and was organised by the CST. Clearly there were two concepts of trade union organisation in conflict..." (p.49)

Here Gonzalez displays the extent of his political ingenuousness as he signally fails to recognise or distinguish the dual and complementary function of a particular division of labour within a newly emergent state apparatus, albeit one going through "teething troubles". The role of all unions, whether formally integrated into that state as with CST, or whether in apparent or real conflict with the immediate aims of that state as with CAUS, is to contain the class struggle within bounds acceptable to capital. During this period of real class tension, the Stalinist CAUS was able to present itself as a left alternative, not in order to place before the workers demands and tactics whose perspective would be a unified and autonomous class struggle, but instead to syphon off militant anger and lead it up a series of one way streets.

In the case of the El Caracol struggle the government approved CST takeover was a necessary manoeuvre by the state in order to hoodwink those workers involved as well as the rest of the class. In a plant the bourgeoisie has abandoned, what better than the workers salvage it by making it into a "co-operative" or instituting a form of "workers' self management" (i.e. workers' self exploitation), than to generalise their struggle to wider layers of the class, a tactic that today is proving to be the only realistic way forward. Contrary to the popular rumours spread by the SWP, "workers control" is entirely compatible with the continued operation of capital (e.g. Yugoslavia, Poland 1980) and in cases such as El Caracol is absolutely necessary for its continued survival.

Although making plain the continuing political contradictions between the old traditional bourgeoisie and the FSLN, the author fails to perceive that the latter is a new state-bourgeoisie in the making, one which initially expressed the aspirations and entrepreneurial designs of petty and middle capital suffocated by the Somoza regime and whose reconstruction of the economy is now precluded without the intervention of financial credit and technical

continued on p.3

COMMUNIST REVIEW

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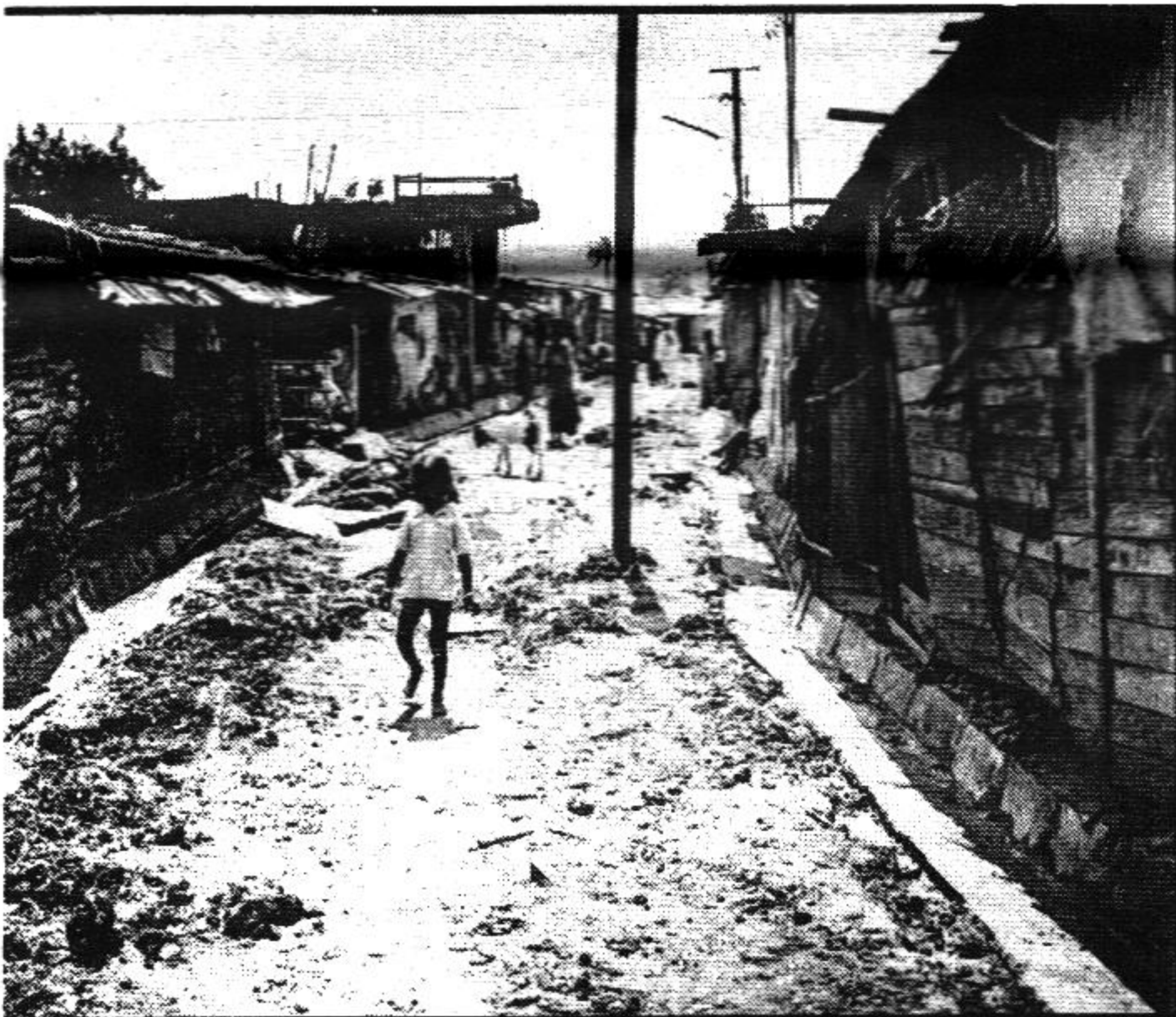
BHOPAL

One year on Capitalism is still killing

CAPITALISM KILLS!

We are publishing here a leaflet distributed by the CWO on behalf of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party [IBRP] at a demonstration in Sheffield last December to mark the anniversary of the Bhopal gas leak. Sheffield is the home of Union Carbide's U.K. headquarters and the demonstration, organised by a local Bhopal Solidarity Group with the support of the Labour Party and trade unions, was well-publicised throughout the city and through the usual "labour movement" channels. The theme of this publicity was that "Union Carbide Kills" and that the company must be pressurised into compensating the "people of Bhopal" with the corollary that more effective controls must be forced onto transnational companies like Union Carbide in order to prevent further accidents.

While all revolutionaries support the Bhopal workers and their families' fight for compensation we have also the task of placing responsibility for such disasters on the real culprit: i.e. on the capitalist system itself and of preparing the political basis for its destruction by the international working class. Thus the IBRP leaflet set out to show that disasters like Bhopal are intrinsic to a system which, as the economic crisis deepens worldwide, brings increasingly worse working conditions for the whole working class as each firm seeks to "cut costs" and "maximise profits".



Before the disaster

That the events at Bhopal were no accident can hardly be disputed. - The plant was built 'on the cheap' with corrosive carbon steel instead of the stainless steel of the original design. Shortly before the MIC gas leak - itself only one of 60 other leaks in the previous 5 years - Union Carbide had reduced maintenance workers at the plant by 50%. A disaster on the scale of Bhopal was only a matter of time. But to suppose that the working class can win the fight against multinationals through the unions and various legislative channels is either naive or hypocrisy. On the one hand "3rd World" governments in particular are falling over backwards to attract multinationals, with blatant offers of a cheap and quiescent labour-force whose health and safety is totally disregarded. On the other, multinational firms who find that a particular workforce is becoming "recalcitrant" and demanding improvements in working conditions which threaten profit margins can simply switch production to a less problematic "free enterprise" zone.

The Indian Government is not alone in relaxing health and safety standards for the sake of attracting multinational employers. And it is not only in India that trade unions soften their criticism for fear of capital's withdrawal elsewhere. In the event, the support of the Labour Council and the trade unions for the demonstration in Sheffield was lukewarm; after all, any significant protest might have lost them the goodwill of local Union Carbide bosses and other potential employers. - And for these lap-dogs of the capitalists cringing to the bosses is second nature.

On December 3rd last year the worst "industrial accident" in capitalism's history occurred at Union Carbide's pesticide plant in Bhopal, India. Between 5 - 15,000 people were killed by the poisonous MIC gas. 20,000 were too badly injured to ever work again. Thousands more are suffering horrendous medical complications [such as spontaneous abortions].

But Bhopal was no accident. Such incidents are a daily fact of life - as the latest news of hundreds gassed in New Delhi from a fertiliser plant shows. We live under a system of production which depends upon profit for its survival. Inevitably concern for the environment and the health and safety of workers - who produce the surplus value which is the source of all profit - takes second place. If this is true of the long-established capitalist heartlands it is even more true of the periphery where conditions imposed by imperialist relations ensure that labour power is cheap and easily expendable. In India alone the general population is four or five times more infected with pesticides than her European counterpart.

Union Carbide is just one multinational amongst many which, while flouting health and safety laws at home [its factories in West Virginia are known as "Cancer Valley"], in places like India it doesn't even need to recognise their existence. Such companies extract massive super-profits by employing workers from the huge pool of unemployed 'reserve labour': people who are compelled to work for a pittance, to live in insanitary shanty towns and to suffer all manner of industrial diseases, pollution and "accidents" as they literally work themselves to death for capital. In this they are encouraged by the various national Governments and trades unions who turn a blind eye to infringement of what weak safety rules happen to exist for fear of losing the 'patronage' of the multinationals. Union Carbide workers in Bhopal who occupied the plant after the "accident" were turned out by Government troops - this is how the world's "largest democracy" supports its workers in distress.

Campaigning against one multinational only obscures the real issue. Capitalism cannot be reformed. It is the same the world over. Calls for more government controls are pointless when the state-owned industries work on the same profit basis. Only last month workers in Colombo [Sri Lanka] were killed in a chemical leak from a state-owned pesticide plant. And back in "socialist" Sheffield our council leader has called for the "Union Carbide Kills" banner to be removed from the Town Hall since it is "offensive" to local businessmen. This shows that it's no good workers thinking that by joining with philanthropists, Social Democrats, Labourites and middle-class do-gooders in general their lot will be improved. Capitalism has to be destroyed!

REAL SOLIDARITY

The only effective response to the international power of capital can be the resistance of the international working class. What is needed is an international working class party to organise and lead this resistance. Until capitalism everywhere is overthrown and the international working class takes control of the planet to ensure that production is geared to meet social needs the working class will continue to be poisoned and maimed and the earth polluted for the sake of profits.

For working people here who want to show real solidarity with the "people of Bhopal" - i.e. with the working people of Bhopal, this must go beyond financial assistance. It means recognising that an international political struggle by an independent working class has to begin. It means working for the political understanding and practical organisation to fight capital worldwide. At the end of the day it means international proletarian revolution: the only way to end the daily horrors of existence under capitalism, of which Bhopal is only the most dramatic example. Join us in our struggle to form an international party of the working class.

INTERNATIONAL BUREAU FOR THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY
December 1985

This leaflet was distributed by members of the Communist Workers Organisation, affiliate in Britain to the International Bureau [IBRP]. It was supported by the IBRP members in Italy - the Internationalist Communist Party [Battaglia Comunista] and our comrades in France as well as Lal Pataka, a sympathising organisation of the Bureau in India.

The disaster at Bhopal and its aftermath have underlined once more that the international working class cannot rely on any of the existing political organisations or trade unions to defend its interests. In India today the process of defining the political basis for forming the nucleus of an independent working class party - which will in future be part of an international class party - is underway. [See the International Report in Workers Voice 24]. Spearheading this process is Lal Pataka, a group in Bengal which also supported the IBRP leaflet here. At the moment their priority is to produce Lal Pataka as a quarterly theoretical journal. For this funds are required. We ask our readers who want to contribute to the work of the comrades in India to send donations to:



LAL PATAKA
Dal Madal Road
P.O. Bishnupur
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West Bengal
INDIA

SHEFFIELD : SLAVEMASTERS AT FORGEMASTERS

On Wednesday, 16th October 1985 700 men at the Atlas site of Sheffield Forgemasters went on strike after the bosses withdrew a £4 pay offer and demanded that each section negotiate a separate agreement. Real wages have fallen dramatically in Forgemasters since the defeat of the steelworkers' strike in 1980 (for two years they received no pay increase at all) and the management, riding high with the rest of the bourgeoisie after the defeat of the miners' strike, soon demonstrated its determination by threatening to sack the entire workforce. It is to the eternal credit of the Forgemasters workers that they were not cowed by this and continued the strike for a further nine weeks until just before Christmas when the sackings began. Equally encouraging was the response of the workers at the other plant in the combine who, after financially supporting the strike until Christmas, afterwards joined in protest against the sackings. Now the slavemasters have nobody working for them at Forgemasters.

But the workers haven't only had to fight Philip Wright, the manager of Forgemasters. They also had to resist the attempts of their union, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation [ISTC] to get them to return to work without a pay rise and under worse shop-floor conditions. Whilst the workers stood solid against the management threats all the unions caved in and ordered a return to work. However, as the ISTC had announced its decision first it was its members who, reviving memories of 1980 when steelmen tore up their union cards outside the City Hall, told 'their' union where to go. The other steel unions [AEUW/TGWU] kept quiet but it was obvious that they too had entered into a back to work deal.

The ISTC's record is a particularly black

one. Ordering steelworkers to scab in the miners' strike on the grounds that "steelworkers shouldn't sacrifice themselves on someone else's altar", they have not only been unable to save steel jobs but have even helped plan the redundancies. Ten years ago there were 210,000 workers in BSC, today there are 65,000. But the ISTC has also done its bit for "the nation" (i.e. for the ruling class) since production is only down by one third.

However, the ISTC's infamy shouldn't blind us to the fact that it is not alone. All unions today accept the rules of the capitalist game - about there being 'overproduction' of steel, about the need for higher productivity, more redundancies and lower wages. The ultimate logic of this is to get workers to become no better than slaves. The unions can't even defend the short-term immediate interests of workers today. Workers therefore must defend themselves. And the only basis for that defence is to recognise that the present system works against the interests of humanity. What sense does it make to cut steel production when two thirds of the world needs better agricultural machinery, for example? Only a continuous struggle for communism can create the basis for a new society which puts people's needs before capitalist profits.

In the immediate term the workers at Forgemasters are in a weak position. The firm has lost 11,000 workers in five years. It was set up by Macgregor to get rid of River Don from BSC and to begin restructuring BSC itself. The demolition at the Atlas site has now assumed massive proportions. To fight against this we must learn the lessons of the recent past. As we wrote in a recent

leaflet given out at Gartcosh by our Scottish comrades:

"The main lesson of the 1980 steel strike and the miners' strike of 84-5 is that no one section of the working class fighting on its own can win against the state. The 1980 steel strike failed because the ISTC made sure it was kept confined within the steel industry. Despite a whole year of bitter struggle the miners were defeated, not just because the ruling class was better prepared, but because union tactics left them isolated."

To break this isolation workers at Forgemasters should link their struggle to that of the threatened workers at Gartcosh, Clydesdale, Imperial and Dalzell works in Scotland. Steelworkers, nor any workers who want to conduct a real fight, must not accept the isolation imposed on the struggle by the local and national union leaders. They will have to go beyond the necessary but limited demand for financial support and get more active solidarity. For the sacked workers in Sheffield and those threatened with redundancies in Central Scotland our demands are the same:

Take the fight outside the union machine. Elect recallable strike committees. Send delegations of workers to seek solidarity at Shotton and Ravenscraig. Get all movement of steel stopped. Extend and link up the struggle with all workers in a similar position - e.g. at BR Springburn, Scott Lithgows. Make demonstrations unified ones, across industry and trade union boundaries. Help to form factory groups of communist militants.

**"ENOUGH OF CLOSURES! NO MORE REDUNDANCIES!
FOR A UNIFIED FIGHT AGAINST CAPITALISM! FOR
THE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION."**

CRISIS OF THE LEFT

continued from the front page

Party and the TUC. Thus the Communist Party simply echoes the official Labour line. "Unity" of the Party (which won't admit them as members!) being paramount, whilst the WRP's slogan throughout the miners' strike was "Get the TUC to call a general strike" which usually earned them the hollow laughter of the miners who realised that the TUC was doing its utmost to ensure that their strike remained isolated.

But if the present crisis of the Left has revealed the organisations most integrated into the Labour Party and union bureaucracy as capitalist factions the most obvious exposure has been that of the Socialist Workers Party [SWP]. The SWP has been the most radical of

the leftist groups, stealing and perverting ideas from our ancestors in the Communist Left (particularly in Italy), such as the state capitalist analysis of Russia, and using these as a cover for its essentially reactionary activities. Indeed, when we come to analyse the SWP's view of state capitalism we find it closer to the present-day Stalinists - the Maoists - who conclude that although it is not "socialism" it is a "progressive" step. Thus, like the Maoists, the SWP gives support to movements of national liberation which are couched in the framework of state capitalist ideology and leadership. We will expand on this in a future issue but the point that state capitalism has no real significance in the SWP's political armoury can be seen in its siren calls to the Labour Left (i.e. Militant), its support (albeit "critical") for Scargill and Been who all believe that state capitalism is socialism.

CONCLUSION

In Britain over the last six years we have seen a bourgeoisie on the offensive. In its own terms it is "moving rightwards". The accompanying drift to the right of the parties to the left of Labour shows that they too operate within the orbit of bourgeois politics, despite claims to represent the cause of the working class. This is because they are a product, not of the independent working class struggle, but a response to the need of the bourgeoisie to ensure that its ideas and world view continue to dominate the working class. This rightward drift opens up new opportunities for communists to propagandise and develop within the working class, but we have no illusions about the difficulty of our task. As the old parties split and collapse new, apparently more radical forces are being developed by the bourgeoisie to fill their place. Forces like the Revolutionary Communist Party are already claiming that "the old labour movement is dead" and that are the "party of the future". As they rush into the space created by the crisis of the Left they are however, simply another, more radical and thus more dangerous, faction of the bourgeoisie's left wing. We will deal with this latest obstacle placed in the way of the development of a proletarian organisation in our next issue. For the moment it is enough to note that the

RCP has already demonstrated its bourgeois credentials by supporting imperialist war (in the Falklands War it supported the military dictators of Argentina instead of taking Lenin's position of revolutionary defeatism) and by insisting that Russian workers aren't exploited.

To conclude, the present crisis of the left is in no way a crisis of the revolutionary class. Provided communists can recognise the need for the creation of a principled, programmatically clear organisation which seeks to work consistently within the working class, the new period, whatever its objective difficulties for the working class as a whole, poses a series of challenges and opportunities for its vanguard to develop. It is to this vanguard which is questioning the whole basis of leftism that we must direct our appeal in the months ahead.

C.W.O.

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OPEN MEETINGS

Meetings on the theme:

**CRISIS OF THE LEFT:
NO CRISIS FOR REVOLUTIONARIES**

will be held in:

LEEDS: Wednesday, 5th February
Trades Club, Savile Mount
Leeds 7. 8.00 p.m.

LONDON: Saturday, 15th February
Conway Hall, Red Lion
Square, London WC1
2.00 p.m.

All welcome.