

# WORKERS VOICE

COMMUNIST  
WORKERS  
ORGANISATION

## CONTENTS

Britain.....p2. Anarchism and the War in Spain...p4.  
Peru.....p3. Ireland; Class Struggle .....p8.

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30 30p

## SOUTH AFRICA

# CLASS STRUGGLE NOT SANCTIONS

Neither the intensity of the social conflict in South Africa, nor the ferocity of the repression meted out by the apartheid regime show any signs of abatement. Black workers in South Africa are striking and taking to the streets in an unexampled display of heroism against armoured cars, guns and sjamboks under the state of emergency, just as they did before its declaration. In its present form the South African state can only function as a naked military dictatorship, throwing aside all its "democratic" pretenses, which anyway never had any meaning for its black majority. The continuation of the present social conflict indefinitely is unthinkable. Either there will be a greatly increased attack on the black population—which anyway could only provide a temporary relief—or the apartheid regime will be overthrown by the black social movement. These however, are options that put the huge military, economic and political interests of western imperialism in South Africa at risk, and every day the urgency of enforcing a solution that protects these interests grows.

### WESTERN IMPERIALISM DIVIDED.

Let us be quite clear; none of the various statesmen who pontificate about finding a solution to the crisis have anything but the interests of western imperialism at heart. All "eminent persons", "EEC emissaries" or shuttle diplomat clergymen want to see the establishment of a stable, "democratic" and pro-western South Africa, where the black (and other) workers are exploited under conditions which do not bring about a state of permanent crisis. That much unites them; what is less clear, is how this situation is to be brought about.

One wing of the international bourgeoisie, though it is increasingly isolated, wants to give Botha and his cronies another chance, to maintain "dialogue" and "contact". This group, best represented by Thatcher and the British bourgeois interests, argue that the process of reform in South Africa will be best continued by not leaning on Pretoria too hard. Similarly they feel that should Botha fall, there is no telling what would replace him; possibly a pro-Soviet ANC in the worst scenario. Thus they argue against sanctions, which they believe could topple Botha and lead to "anarchy", while crying crocodile tears about the suffering sanctions would cause black workers. But undoubtedly the material basis for such a perspective lies in the fact that it is the British bourgeoisie which has the largest economic stake in South Africa, which it fears would be hard hit in any generalised campaign of sanctions.

But the development of events is leaving this section of the bourgeoisie increasingly isolated. It was with great difficulty that Thatcher held the line against EEC sanctions and came up with her "mission impossible" for her poodle Howe, to the black "front line" states. Similarly at the meeting of the Commonwealth leaders in London, Thatcher was shown to be out on a limb, and had to make concessions to partial economic sanctions.

More and more international imperialism is

realising that the cosmetic reforms passed by Botha are in no way a step towards the abolition of minority rule, but are an attempt to make minority rule more acceptable to the black masses. And it is glaringly obvious that it is not the abolition of petty apartheid which will allow the emerging black bourgeoisie to sell social peace to the masses, but only the installation of a political structure which pretends to represent the black majority, that is bourgeois democracy in the form of one man, one vote.

It is the intransigence of the Afrikaaner ruling class that leads increasing circles of western imperialism to argue that only the imposition of generalised economic sanctions on the South African economy, which is already reeling from the effects of the world economic crisis, will force the Pretoria regime to enter into "dialogue" with the black opposition groups such as the ANC, and the eventual emergence of a "multi-racial" and pro-western South Africa. This faction of the bourgeoisie believes that the Tutus, Tambos and Mandelas, who have long proclaimed their loyalty to western interests, will be able to hold the black masses in check, in a way that Botha and his ilk no longer can.

Thus the whole debate about sanctions is one between two wings of western imperialism, about how to bring a change to a situation less threatening to its interests. Communists do not take sides in such a debate, whose framework is alien to class politics. These axes around the question of how best the working class can defend their immediate and historical interests against capitalism in all its forms. Perhaps unsurprisingly sundry varieties of leftists, from the Morning Star to Socialist Worker have all joined in the mystificatory chorus about sanctions, as if any form of economic warfare between capitalist states could advance the interests of the working class one iota.

### INSIDE SOUTH AFRICA.

While the furore over sanctions reigns on the international front, events are not staying still in South Africa itself. Botha seems to have contained—for the moment—the fury of the right wing neanderthal elements who oppose even the cosmetic changes in the apartheid system, by the imposition of the state of emergency and crackdown on black political groups. At the same time, he has been attempting to break the back of the social movement in the townships, by arming black thugs to terrorise political activists and also making attempts to seek a social basis in the more backward, rural elements like the tribal chiefs who would accept some kind of client status in a white regime. But it is difficult to see these desperate scramblings as being a real attempt at a political solution, only a hedge against possible civil war.

Meanwhile, there is the more muted, but in the end, more powerful pressure of big business in South Africa on the Botha regime, to engage in a dialogue with the black opposition. These people have seen, in their dealings with the black unions, and talks with the ANC, that here is the

only social force which can restore peace in the factories, mines and townships. Any prospect of sanctions would increase the pressure from South African capitalists on the regime.

But in the final analysis, what happens in South Africa will not be decided by bishops or businessmen, but by the South African working class. Whether the rulers of South Africa manage to maintain their hold, whether imperialism will manage to bring about a smooth transition to majority rule, or whether apartheid will be swept away by the social movement is a question that will be settled in the heat of class confrontation.

### REAL SOLIDARITY WITH SOUTH AFRICAN WORKERS.

The way forward for South African workers is to extend and unify their struggles, for a decisive overthrow of the apartheid regime, not to await the manoeuvres of international imperialism's circus of philanthropists, clerics and clowns. And real solidarity with their struggle does not consist in boycotting South African goods, or clamouring for sanctions, as if there were morally good and morally bad commodities, or good and bad forms of exploitation of labour power. We do not stand for democratic or non racial exploitation, but for the abolition of relations of exploitation.

Real solidarity with the workers of South Africa, as with workers everywhere, consists in extending and unifying our own struggles in the capitalist heartlands, especially against those who pose as the "friends" of South Africa's workers. This does not mean that we can "do nothing" now. Communists work in the South African diaspora, black and white, to win a kernel to our cause and help to implant the politics of the working class in South Africa via such means. Workers can certainly take up workplace collections in solidarity with those suffering class repression in South Africa, and to support their strikes. Employees of multi-nationals hit by strikes in South Africa should not be slow to lend active solidarity and sympathy action to their class brothers abroad, since the workers' struggle knows no frontiers. Upon suspicion that military equipment is being sent to aid the repression of the South African proletariat, workers involved in its production and transport should take all steps to prevent its reaching its goal.

But this is CLASS action, and has nothing to do with a campaign of pin pricks designed to goad the Boer ox out of its laager. Communists hate every form of exploitation. That of the countries of the Pacific Basin is brutal in the extreme, but we don't propose economic sanctions as the solution to the woes of the Korean or Hong Kong workers, but class struggle.

-DOWN WITH THE APARTHEID STATE! FOR ITS OVERTHROW BY CLASS STRUGGLE!

-AGAINST IMPERIALIST PEACE MOVES IN SOUTH AFRICA! NO TO "DEMOCRATIC" EXPLOITATION!

-AGAINST THE CHARADE OF SANCTIONS! FOR CLASS SOLIDARITY WITH SOUTH AFRICAN WORKERS!



# THE END OF THE OIL BOOM

The first six months of 1986 saw the price of crude oil fall from nearly 30 dollars a barrel, to below 10 dollars, touching a low of 5½ dollars at one point. With the failure of the June meeting of OPEC oil ministers to come to any agreement, it became clear that the world crisis of capitalism had at last hit the oil industry with full force. Whatever agreements are patched up in future it is clear that oil is experiencing the fate of other commodity prices in a capitalist crisis; collapse.

The form of the present crisis is the outcome of two conflicting trends. On the one side we had the massive increase in the world's oil production capacity, traceable to the oil crisis of the early 1970's. The huge price increases then imposed by OPEC had the effect of stimulating much new production outside of direct OPEC control, as western imperialism sought to maintain secure supplies of its lifeblood. But much of this new production was only artificially profitable, due to the artificially high price of oil at that time.

The other side of the coin was, that there was no corresponding rise in demand for oil, to match this increased supply potential. Indeed, as the economic crisis began to hit, and as conservation measures began to take effect, the demand for petroleum began to decline relatively, and then absolutely. In June this year, the Institute of Petroleum reported domestic demand for oil down by almost 25% over the year from early 1985.

By acting as the policemen of the world's oil prices, the OPEC countries were slowly cutting their own throats, and were rewarded with an ever decreasing market share. From 50% of world oil, their sales were down to 25% from 1979 to 1986. It was to reverse this falling trend, that the OPEC states, many heavily indebted to Western banks,

flooded the oil markets with cheap oil at the beginning of the present crisis, hoping to drive many marginal non OPEC producers to the wall. But the gamble failed, and the increase in output did not compensate for the downward spiral of prices.

Much has been written in the bourgeois press about the effect of the collapse in oil prices in those countries like Nigeria and Indonesia, which based their dreams of development on oil, and which have since found themselves virtually bankrupt. A closer look at events in the British oil industry will show that the freak situation which has ensured the solvency of British capitalism for the past decade is also ending.

## CRISIS IN THE BRITISH OIL INDUSTRY.

Since North Sea oil is one of the costliest to produce in the world, it has been severely hit. Workers in the oil industry, who were relatively insulated from attacks during the boom years, have now become subject to the same cost cutting measures that their class compatriots in other industries have endured for so long.

The industry's immediate response was to call a halt to all new exploration, and to cancel many existing contracts overnight. The oil rig yards were among the first casualties, and prospects for some are very bleak, especially Howard Doris at Loch Kishorn and Heeremas Lewis Offshore at Stornoway. The yard at Ardersier has announced that 550 jobs are to go in August, unless things improve.

In the hinterland of the U.K.'s oil "capital", Aberdeen, the oil industry had masked the effects of the world economic crisis, despite the decline of traditional industries like fishing and paper making. Oil accounted

directly and indirectly for up to half of local employment, and kept unemployment at below half the national average. Precise figures are difficult to estimate, but in May alone 1100 redundancies were notified in Aberdeen, and at least 5000 jobs have been lost since the collapse in oil prices. And there is more to come. A Fraser of Allender survey of oil related companies showed that 100% expected to shed labour in the coming months.

For those still employed it's the familiar refrain the rest of the class has been hearing for so long. Real wages are under increasing pressure. In June, seamen on the supply boats to the North Sea struck in response to a call for a 25% cut in operating costs. The NUS negotiated "victory" included an open ended wage freeze, longer duty rotas and cuts in sickness and holiday pay. On the oil rigs themselves, unilateral cuts in wages are being imposed.

## THE FUTURE.

Doubtless the oil price will recover from its present level, but most analysts expect that it will stay below 20 dollars a barrel, at which point much of North Sea oil capacity will have to be written off. The effect of this will be to greatly reduce the tax revenue of the British state, and the prelude to even more draconian attacks on the living standards of the working class.

That the crisis has finally reached the previously immune oil industry only serves to illustrate yet again that no country or sector can escape the effects of the economic crisis, and that that crisis is insoluble within the framework of the capitalist system. No section of workers can be under the illusion that they are exempt from the effects of the crisis, and only a concerted effort by all workers can sweep away for good the rule of capitalism.

# WAPPING

As the dispute at Wapping moves into its eighth month, newspaper bosses everywhere are watching its development carefully. They're hoping for a defeat of the Wapping strikers, which will give them reinforced ammunition to attack their own workers. The Guardian, the Daily Telegraph, the Daily Mail, the Mail on Sunday and the Financial Times all plan to move to docklands within the next year, and redundancies and cuts in pay are on the agenda. In fact the Financial Times has recently announced it will sack 404 workers before it moves to its new plant in the Isle of Dogs.

Workers in the newspaper industry haven't taken this lying down. Besides Wapping, 176 NGA workers are in dispute with Maxwell at his Purnells plant in Bristol. They were sacked in April after refusing to accept his "survival plan" which would have meant 55 compulsory redundancies and cuts in take home pay. The strikers in Bristol are facing the same problems as those at Wapping in carrying out their dispute. Their biggest problem is that they are alone. The strikers are all NGA members. SOGAT 82, the Amalgamated Engineering Union and the EETPU have all negotiated away their members jobs in Bristol and have left it to the discretion of dissatisfied individual members as to whether or not to cross the picket line if any attempt is made to move the machinery from the plant. Members of the NGA are also on strike after being locked out of the Burnley Express for taking solidarity action in support of clerical workers and opposing the introduction of direct input technology. The NGA, however, has made no attempt to link this dispute with that going on at Purnells, even though 500 workers there stand to lose their jobs there.

It goes without saying that these two print strikes have been kept as separate as possible from that in Wapping by the print unions. At the recent NGA conference

Dubbins spent his time concentrating on calling for a Labour government to come to power. He echoed Neil Kinnocks' belief that "only British citizens should be able to own Britain's national newspapers and broadcasting organisations". Brenda Dean backed Dubbins' call for the next Labour government to introduce legislation to make ownership of the press a British concern. This is a sentiment dearly held by the National Front, who have issued stickers at Wapping saying "6,000 sacked by an American. Are you

British? We'll keep our newspapers British".

The unions' obsession with Murdoch's country of birth is just a way of avoiding the real issues at Wapping at the moment. Ever since the strikers dismissed Murdoch's "final offer" of £50 millions plus his Gray's Inn Road plant, the strike itself, rather than being stepped up, has reached something of a stalemate. The unions, rather than calling out all their members, have instead tried to channel their demands into a consumer boycott of Murdoch's papers. Despite the fact that the campaign has had little effect on the sales figures, it has become the foremost tactic of the unions, even though it has meant that Sogat strikers are no longer to be paid their £10 a week strike pay, since the union would rather keep the money for the boycott. The unions' idea that to buy one of Maxwells or Shahs papers rather than one of Murdochs to help the strike is of little comfort to the 176 printers locked out by Maxwell at the moment. Consumer boycotts have never been successful in strikes and are no substitute for class solidarity. The miners were defeated in their strike because they were on their own, and the print workers will share the same fate unless they link up with other workers. As we have said since the start of the strike in our leaflets, the way the Wapping workers will succeed is if they take the initiative and take the struggle into their own

hands. This means extending the struggle to Fleet St and the provinces and getting all the print workers out, as well as solidarity action from all workers involved in the newspaper industry.

The other alternative is to let the unions reach an agreement with Murdoch which will include union recognition at Wapping without including full employment for those sacked. This is exactly what Hammond was working on when he met Murdoch in Los Angeles in early July and it's exactly the kind of agreement Dean and Dubbins want. It's also the kind of betrayal we must fight against.

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# THE PRISON REVOLT IN PERU

It is now ten years since Mao Tse Tung died and in the course of that time the failure of China to achieve either development equal to her resources or indeed the "socialism" which Mao often proclaimed has led, not only to a rapprochement between the present Chinese rulers and the West but to the virtual disintegration of Maoism as an ideology and consequently to the collapse of Maoist organisations. One of the few exceptions to this is the Communist Party of Peru which is the subject of the article below, translated from BATTAGLIA COMUNISTA 7/8 (July 1986) paper of our sister organisation in Italy, the Internationalist Communist Party. The article, whilst only intended as a report of the recent prison massacres in Lima also underlines the fact that whatever its pretensions, the Communist Party of Peru (Sendero Luminoso) is still trapped within the framework of bourgeois politics. It is not possible to show all the elements of their politics in this brief introduction but the fact that they unequivocally defend "the genuine revolutionary heritage of Stalin" (since this is the basis of Maoism) will indicate what the Peruvian masses can come to expect if the Communist Party of Peru comes to power. It was not simply "bureaucratic methods" which led to Stalin's labour camps but to the need for the USSR to accumulate capital in order to compete with its imperialist rivals. The narrow nationalism of the likes of the CPP, thinly disguised as anti-imperialism, treads the same road as Stalin before them (the path to the ideology of "socialism in one country") and will therefore be no more successful in liberating the Peruvian masses from their appalling conditions than all the other social democratic efforts of this century. Whilst the actions of Sendero Luminoso have exposed the lie of Peruvian "democracy" they cannot offer a genuine alternative for the working class of Peru (especially since they recognise the peasantry rather than the proletariat as the basis of "the revolution"). For internationalist communists however the movements which are at present led by forces like the CPP are at the same time signs of the readiness of more and more of the masses in capitalism's periphery for revolutionary action and of evidence of the need for a real revolutionary lead to be given by the working class. As we wrote in the "Draft Theses on the Tasks of Communists in Capitalism's Periphery" in our theoretical journal COMMUNIST REVIEW 3;

"...the material existence of the masses favours the radicalisation of consciousness ...Such radical potential facilitates the circulation of the revolutionary communist programme. Obviously we are not saying that radicalisation is the same as revolutionary communist consciousness. But the fact remains that it is easier to spread the communist programme among the masses, and revolutionary communists receive "more attention" than in advanced capitalist societies. Such "better" conditions imply the possibility of organising masses of proletarians around the revolutionary party..." (p.13)

In Peru such a possibility is as yet for the future but the struggle for an independent proletarian party has to come about through an abandonment of all bourgeois ideologies - and this includes the Maoism of the likes of Sendero Luminoso.

## The revolt in the Peruvian prisons

On June 19th the umpteenth act of capitalist barbarism took place in Peru. Following a revolt which broke out in the three prisons of El Fonton, Lurigancho and Santa Barbara more than 500 of the inmates were massacred after they had surrendered and were waiting to return to their cells.

A lot of these prisoners belonged to the guerrilla movement "Sendero Luminoso" ("Shining Path"), a Maoist group which had succeeded in creating a firm stronghold in the prisons and had begun a process of political indoctrination of the ordinary prisoners aided by the conditions of hunger, poverty and economic marginalisation prevalent in Peru.

After the massacre the country was shaken by a frightening series of dynamitings, amongst which was that of a train near Cuzco in which eight foreign tourists lost their lives. This had followed so many other acts of violence (e.g. five technicians beaten to death) that the Government was forced to proclaim a state of emergency and a curfew in the regions involved.

Sendero Luminoso has been given the opportunity for growth by the dramatic social reality of Peru where many Indians live in conditions which have not gone beyond that of serfdom, and in which a large number of people, divided into small or tiny communities, survive by working some pocket handkerchief-sized piece of land which yields a few ears of maize and some potatoes.

In 1968, under the "progressive" military regime of General Velasco Alvarado, the Peruvian ruling class had tried to create new social structures and start the economic and political "modernisation" of the country. This attempt was a miserable failure.

It was followed by a static period which became objectively more regressive until the victory of the APRA party (Peru's own brand of "socialism") seemed to be the prelude to a new programme for reform. But Peru conforms to the general rule which compels all countries in the capitalist periphery to watch the widening gap which exists between them and the countries in the citadels of capitalism. The underdevelopment of countries like Peru is simply a condition of the development of others.

"Socialism" in power didn't make the country progress by a single step; it has, on the contrary unchained the reaction of the extreme right wing which has still got the reins of real power completely in its hands. The young President, Alan Garcia, would like to make Peru one of the Western social democracies (so much so that he would like the "Socialist International" to be based in Lima) and thus he is forced to hold in check the upper echelons of the military: the encounter taking the character of a trial of strength between different factions of the bourgeoisie, divided not only over political questions but also over their international "sympathies".

It was Garcia himself, however, who unleashed the ferocious repression against the prisoners. Once the deed was done however, he wept buckets of crocodile tears to demonstrate his anger at the "atrocious massacre" and to show that he is ready to make those responsible pay the "full price". He thus created a distinction between the Army, which had been ordered to suppress the revolt (their operation had already led to a score of deaths amongst the prisoners), and the agents of the Llai-Pan-Atic, the crack squad of Republican Guards responsible, it is said, for the mass killings. This distinction was later silently watered down in the arrest of some insignificant scapegoat.

The General Confederation of Labour (the CGT - Peruvian equivalent of the TUC) has demanded the dismissal of four Ministers (of Defence, the Navy, Home Affairs and Justice), accusing them of choosing to turn the revolt into a massacre. The Izquierda Unida (the United Left opposition alliance) together with the omnipresent Catholic Church and the unions, has called for a ... "protest march". In short they are all trying to find grist for their own mills in order to obtain the widest possible support, electoral or otherwise.

In terms of its poverty and backwardness Peru holds one of the leading places in the geography of Latin America. It has a foreign debt of 13 billion dollars, a population (18 million inhabitants) reduced to casual labour in 46% of cases; since 1984 it has suspended all interest payments to American banks, whilst 62% of Peruvians are suffering from malnutrition. Only about 10% of the population can manage to live without real problems. In Lima - 6 million inhabitants - half the people live by begging, prostitution, theft, rubbish picking (the so-called "informal" occupations). In the majority of cases we are talking about peasants who have fled from the countryside. It is the breeding ground for widespread violence. In the Andean zone of Ayacucho, controlled by Shining Path, a guerrilla war rages; there the Army has a free hand to carry out a pitiless repression using Argentinian methods. Tens of thousands of workers have been butchered here for an ideal of liberty and redemption which Shining Path will never be able to secure for them. Shining Path is only the armed equivalent of the bourgeois opposition. The "path" which the Peruvian working class have taken will also be "shining" but for the tasks of the communist revolution they will need to build a motorway.

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## REVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVES

Second Series  
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It is exactly fifty years ago since the event which bourgeois histories universally call "the Spanish Civil War" began. The rising of a group of disaffected Army officers on July 18th 1936 soon won it the overwhelming support of the most reactionary sections of the Spanish ruling classes and the instant aid of Fascist dictators like Mussolini and Hitler. The story of how the British and French ruling classes, in their desire to appease Hitler, cooked up the theory of "non-intervention" to avoid supporting the legally elected Popular Front government of Spain is well known. Equally well-known is the fact that this played an important part in the victory of the nationalists led by General Franco. Less well-known are the facts about the real class struggle in Spain which the war which broke out in July 1936 put an end to. Although the rising of the Generals provoked another revolt, of a spontaneous nature, by the working class the Spanish Republic aided and abetted by the Anarchists, Socialists and Stalinists was able to survive it. This was because these forces which pretended to represent the working class put the cause of bourgeois democracy before that of proletarian revolution. Today's celebrations of the anniversary of the Spanish War are therefore bourgeois celebrations which salute "the anti-fascist struggle" but which pretend that this was all part of the "revolution". In the foreword to one of the publications celebrating those events Michael Foot, ex-Labour Leader and humbug wrote that "the more the whole story is unravelled and recalled the better for the future of democracy everywhere". What he really meant was that the more bourgeois versions of the story are trotted out the safer will the democratic form of capitalist government be. This brief article can only indicate the outlines of the real proletarian history of those events by exploding the myth that the fight for the Republic was a working class fight.

#### ANTI-FASCISM - THE SLOGAN OF IMPERIALISM

The events in Spain are often treated as if the Iberian Peninsula has no connection with the rest of Europe and that the struggles there were somehow unique to Spain. In one sense this was true since the Spanish ruling class has been so divided in 1914 that it had never entered the First World War. Thus despite the intensity of class struggle in Spain in the early part of the century there was nothing to compare with the struggles in those countries which had been devastated by the war. Thus the settling of accounts between bourgeoisie and proletariat in those countries in the early 1920s (e.g the defeat of the workers in Italy in 1920 or in Germany in the March Action of 1921) had no sequel in Spain.

The defeat of the revolutionary wave which followed the First World War was however to have its consequences for the Spanish workers in the 1930s since the Spanish workers not only struggled in isolation from most of the rest of the European working class but also faced the full onslaught of an imperialist network of diplomacy its final preparations for another generalised war. How did this situation arise?

The First World War, as Bukharin clearly saw, was only the first round in a series of imperialist conflicts which continue to this day. In Eastern Europe the defeated and discontented bourgeoisies, once they had repelled the revolutionary impulses of the working class and had massacred the most class conscious of them, turned to nationalist, authoritarian right wing regimes which aimed at internal order and at imperialist expansion. Fascism became the bourgeois fashion of the 1920s and 1930s in Europe. With the rise to power of the Nazis in Germany in 1933 came a new round of frenetic diplomatic activities. The effete aristocrats who ran the British and French Foreign Offices tried to turn Hitler's attentions to the East to tame "the bestial appetites of Bolshevism" (Churchill). By now however Stalin's USSR had about as much relationship to the revolutionary Bolshevism of 1917 as a maggot to a corpse. It fed only on its proletarian reputation in order to

use it to fool the workers in the rest of Europe into thinking that Russia remained a workers state. The Comintern, once conceived by Lenin as a genuine workers international which would guide the approaching world revolution was by now nothing but a second office of the Foreign Ministry of Russian imperialism. It was in the Comintern that Stalin was to launch his major diplomatic offensive to win over the Western democracies to an anti-Nazi alliance. At the 7th Comintern Congress in 1935 the policy of the Popular Front was first announced. Now Communist parties throughout Europe were instructed to make electoral and other forms of alliance, not only with other so-called workers parties (like the Social Democrats who had saved imperialism both during and after the First World War) but also with liberals and conservatives of the old sort who were opposed to the new totalitarian government of fascism. Anti-fascism was thus the slogan which would unite Russia to Western imperialism. Although it failed initially to achieve Stalin's objective of an anti-German alliance it was the ideological basis of the alliance with the USA and Britain after 1941. In Spain though anti-fascism was to perform a great service for the Spanish bourgeoisie.

#### THE SPANISH REPUBLIC AND THE POPULAR FRONT

The Spanish bourgeoisie had been unable to establish a stable form of domination over society even when the conditions for the accumulation of capital were good. In the situation after the 1929 Wall St. Crash, when the class struggle intensified, it found it almost impossible to unite against the working class. This was the fundamental cause of the bourgeois "Civil War". The tragedy for the Spanish workers was that their own civil war against the whole bourgeoisie was abandoned as it became drawn into the struggle on the side of "democracy" against fascism.

The Spanish Republic was set up in 1931 following the collapse of the military dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera who fled to Paris when Spain's economic problems became manifestly insoluble. The Republic was the product of Republican and Socialist intellectuals who represented the industrial bourgeoisie (the leading Socialist Prieto was in fact a millionaire from industrial holdings in the Basque country) and immediately aroused the anger of the traditional agrarian capitalist class who tried to retain their traditional privileges whilst using the new power of domination that capitalism gave them over the labour force. Whilst the latter organised themselves effectively enough to win power from 1933 to 1935 (the so-called "Black Two Years") the Republicans, Socialists and tiny Communist Party (PCE) eagerly grasped at the Popular Front formula of the Comintern in order to win the elections of February 1936. The accession to power of the Left wing of the Spanish ruling class did not lead to a new period of quietness in the class struggle. Rather the opposite happened since the working class intensified its struggle and demanded that the bourgeois politicians keep some of the promises which they had been so liberal with in the election campaign. Strikes, assassinations and lockouts were daily occurrences in the first half of 1936. It was the failure of the Left to tame the working class that led to the attempted coup by Franco. But Franco's coup unleashed a spontaneous revolt of the workers throughout Spain - above all in Madrid and Barcelona.

#### THE WORKERS RISING

When news of Franco's coup reached Madrid the Republican leaders of the Government were paralysed. Although they had arms at their disposal they knew the dangers that Spanish capitalism would run if these were handed over to the one force capable of organising against the Generals. The working class would not only be able to fight the fascists but would be in a position to carry out the social revolution. Whilst the Government of Martinez Barrios refused to arm the workers the working class were

# THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR AND THE

already attacking the barracks of Republican Assault Guards and the Civil Guard in Madrid and Barcelona and seized arms for themselves. In this situation the Popular Front Government shuffled the pack once more and replaced Martinez Barrios with the Giral Government which contained PSOE leaders. This government now sanctioned what was already going on except that the weapons were released into the hands of the trades unions. By April 20th the bourgeoisie was already finding the organisational means to recuperate the spontaneous revolt of two days earlier. It was the beginning of a process which converted the class anger of the workers into the mere adjunct of an inter-imperialist war. Instrumental in this process, and indeed essential to it was the role of the two supposedly proletarian organisations, the anarchist CNT and the PSOE and its union organisation, the UGT.

#### THE DEBACLE OF SPANISH ANARCHISM

Anarchism is currently undergoing something of revival in Western Europe though it seems unlikely that the majority of those who now nominally espouse the doctrine know much about either its history or its theory. In Spain the bankruptcy of anarchist theory was to have tragic consequences for the proletariat. In 1936 the Anarchists of the CNT-FAI represented the vast majority of the class conscious proletarians of Barcelona and they openly declared the struggle against Franco to be the beginning of a social revolution. Unfortunately these fine words were not matched by CNT deeds which revealed the inadequacy of anarchism as a revolutionary theory of the proletariat.

The first Anarchist capitulation came in Catalonia where the bourgeois President of the Catalan Government told the CNT leaders that "Today you are the masters of the city", a thought so terrifying for them that they promptly accepted his plea that "you can count on me and my loyalty as a man who is convinced that the whole past of shame is dead and desires passionately that Catalonia should henceforth stand among the most progressive countries in the world." (From the book by the CNT leader Garcia Oliver, DE JULIO A JULIO). So instead of destroying bourgeois power the Anarchists left it intact and soon fell in with the Popular Front mentality which they had abstained from earlier. Instead of proclaiming the end of the Popular Front and its replacement with proletarian power they actually set up an Anti-Fascist Militias Committee which co-ordinated the actions of the Anarchists with those of the Socialists and the Communists and thus consolidated the bourgeois power of the Popular Front government. In November 1936 they went one better and joined the Madrid Government, now headed by Largo Caballero of the PSOE. When Juan Peiro, Federica Montseny and Garcia Oliver joined the Popular Front the CNT daily, SOLIDARIDAD OBRERA, called it "the most transcendental day in the history of our country." The same paper went on to maintain that this was a step forward for the proletarian revolution;

"The government in this hour, as a regulating instrument of the organisms of the State no longer represents the organism which divides society into classes. And both will tend even less to oppress the people as a result of the intervention of the CNT (in the government)." (From LESSONS OF THE SPANISH REVOLUTION by the anarchist Vernon Richards.) After denying for decades that the Marxists were wrong to maintain the need for a proletarian power as oppressive the Anarchists now leapt into bed with the bourgeoisie claiming that this prostitution would convert the bourgeois state to the workers friend. Furthermore the CNT adopted the same slogans as the other Popular Front parties that the war and the revolution were inseparable. This was precisely what the Stalinists were saying since concern for the anti-fascist fight was the best means to undermine the independent struggles of the



# R IE MYTH OF ANARCHISM

Spanish proletariat.

However whilst many anarchists would concede these failures they take refuge in the fact that "the real revolution" was taking place in the countryside, in the agrarian collectives. This not only reveals the cardinal weakness of anarchism in that it fails to see that without control of the political process no economic revolution can be meaningfully enacted but also shows that these anarchists are blind to the facts. The agrarian collectives, whatever the subjective will of their members, did not do away with the essentially exploitative relations of a class society. Each collective worked for itself in competition with other collectives and thus we had a kind of Proudhonist world which divided the collectives into rich and poor, depending on the nature of the land around them. Even anarchists like Richards were forced to admit that;

"In some factories all the workers drew a fixed weekly wage, but in others the profits or income were shared out amongst the workers, an arrangement which...was not compatible with the spirit of the revolution."

the Asturias rising of 1934. In fact the PSOE leader actually made a major contribution to the defeat of the workers here by warning the bourgeoisie if what was happening as well as calling off the insurrection in the rest of Spain. However since the courts gave Largo Caballero a 30 year prison sentence (which no-one expected him to serve) he emerged as a martyr in the bourgeois press and now took to calling himself "the Spanish Lenin" (in order to live up to this gross comparison this lifelong reformist took to reading Lenin's works whilst he spent a few months in prison). (See WORKERS VOICE 19 for a more detailed account of the Asturias rising). As we shall see Largo Caballero's false reputation as a genuine socialist was to be very useful to the counter-revolution in the early months of the Spanish War.

This was particularly true of the first week of the workers insurrection after the Franco coup. The issue was posed clearly at the time by the International Communist Left in their journal BILAN: "The facts speak clearly in this respect. It was precisely after 19th July that the proletariat by joining its armed struggle with the general strike succeeded in advancing the furthest on the

which was created specifically to increase the loyalty of the workers to the Popular Front. In short it completed the process of turning the class war into an imperialist war. This was further underlined by the entry of the Stalinists into the Government for the first time. Although there were only two PCE ministers they retained an influence far beyond their numbers since the Popular Front was entirely dependent on the USSR for its arms and other supplies. This influence was used to further the policies of Stalin in gaining an alliance with the Western powers and this meant that the social revolution in Spain had to be crushed.

## THE RISE OF THE SPANISH COMMUNIST PARTY

The leaders of the Spanish Communist Party were a singularly colourless bunch and the party had always been a pliant tool of Moscow. At the beginning of the Spanish War its numbers had been minuscule but the needs of the Spanish bourgeoisie soon changed that. The outbreak of the war caught Stalin by surprise and it was thus some months before he was able to send arms to aid the Republic. With the arms came his agents like Gero, Togliatti and Codovilla. They were soon to be the real rulers on the Republican side. Their first orders to the PCE was that it defend the rights of property owners everywhere in the Republican zone since the weak and divided liberal Republican parties had failed to do this. Whilst the initial idea behind the policy was to prove to the ruling classes in Britain and France that the Republic wasn't very "Red" at all and thus worthy of the support of the "democracies" it actually led to a rise in PCE membership.

Whilst this policy won over individual Tories like the Duchess of Atholl the French and British were far more interested in a German than a Russian alliance so for the time being the policy failed. However within Spain it led to a dramatic rise in the numbers of the PCE which became a mass party on the basis of the support it enjoyed amongst the petty bourgeois producers of areas like Murcia and Valencia. And with the PCE in the Government to take advantage of the splits amongst the socialists it was PCE policies which dominated (such as the replacement of the militias by a regular bourgeois army and the shipment of the Spanish gold reserves to Russia to ostensibly buy arms). By May 1937 the PCE was ready to crush the last vestiges of proletarian independence which continued to manifest itself in workers control of public utilities and factories in Catalonia. The famous "May Days" of 1937 began when the Salinists attempted to seize the Barcelona Telephone exchange and workers throughout the city took to arms and threw up barricades all over the city. The event was the final capitulation of the CNT before a reality they could not understand. After a few days fighting they negotiated a ceasefire, the outcome of which was to deliver the city into the hands of the Stalinists. Whilst a few individual militants were prepared to ignore the ceasefire the Barcelona working class followed the CNT leaders for the last time and thus they were delivered up to the PCE which was able to take over the city with 5000 Assault Guards and the blessing of the new Socialist Government of Negrin. Having ended the social revolt in the interests of the bourgeoisie Largo Caballero and the Anarchist Ministers were now expendable. In the next two years Barcelona and Madrid were to be subject to two terrors - first that of the SIM (Spanish equivalent of the NKVD) and then that of Franco.

## LESSONS OF THE SPANISH WAR

We have tried to demonstrate here that, despite the heroism and the class consciousness of the Spanish workers the events in Spain could not have reached a successful conclusion for the working class for two fundamental reasons. The first was the fact that the struggle for socialism has to be made on an international front which paralyses the capacity of imperialism to use the turmoil to its own advantages. In Spain the converse occurred - a potential proletarian revolution was from its earliest days converted into both a training ground for new techniques of warfare (which Picasso's "Guernica" so graphically illustrates) and a pawn in the game of international diplomacy leading towards the second generalised imperialist war of the century. The defeat of the workers in



The bodies of workers and their enemies outside the Moncada Barracks in Madrid, July 1936.

By fostering illusions about a political and economic revolution the Anarchists became part of the process of the counter-revolution itself and thus played their part in preparing the way for the final act of the Stalinist counter-revolution - the May Days of 1937 in Barcelona.

## THE SOCIALISTS AND THE STALINISTS

The CNT were however only the sorcerer's apprentices at counter-revolution compared with the vastly more politically experienced Socialist Party (PSOE) who in their turn were destroyed by the Stalinists of the PCE.

The PSOE was a typical reformist party of the Second International but unlike its counter-parts elsewhere it was able to maintain the myth that it was still a workers party because the Spanish bourgeoisie had not entered the imperialist war in 1914. This meant that the PSOE was not involved in mobilising workers for the war as in other European countries. However the PSOE had its own forms of class collaboration since its leader had become Minister of Labour under the Primo de Rivera dictatorship whilst the Republic was actually set up by an alliance of Socialists and liberal politicians. What kept the PSOE's reputation as a workers party above all was its supposed leading role in

revolutionary road, acquiring the highest political consciousness compatible with its ideological immaturity, carrying the SOCIAL struggle to its highest point... The general strike immediately took on a political and insurrectionary character while the workers were putting forward their demands: the 36 hour week, wage increases, the tentative moves towards the appropriation of the factories, without however, in the absence of the class party - grasping the necessity for the destruction of the bourgeois state. But this understanding could have been reached subsequently, in the course of the process of formation of a party, if the workers had kept the struggle on the terrain of their own class interests, their material conditions, the only basis which would allow them to oppose the WHOLE capitalist class." But the socialist UGT and the anarchist CNT both brought the general strike to an end in the interests of the war against Franco. They returned factories to bourgeois supporters of the Popular Front so that only Nationalist-owned factories were expropriated and, as we have already seen converted the spontaneous militia committees into the Anti-Fascist Militia Committee which was a mere appendage of the Popular Front.

In November 1936 the collaboration of the CNT and the PSOE-UGT reached its apogee in the formation of the Largo Caballero Government



# SPANISH CIVIL WAR

continued from p5

Germany, Russia Britain and Italy in the 1920s meant that the only possible support the Spanish workers might have counted on would have been from the French working class. Surely it is no accident therefore that the only other working class which was fully under the influence of the ideology of Popular Frontism was that in France where the workers were not physically defeated but were dominated by the same bourgeois ideology in the guise of socialism as in Spain.

The domination of bourgeois ideology over the proletariat in Spain also accounts for the failure of the Spanish workers to break either from PSOE reformism or the petty bourgeois localism of the CNT to form the class party of the proletariat. Even those elements which attempted to break with the domination of the counter-revolutionary Third International like the POUM, the Friends of Durrutti or the Trotskyists all fell into the same trap - the trap of anti-fascism. Instead of supporting the autonomous struggles of the proletariat in July 1936 they tried to limit these struggles within the limits of the bourgeois aims of the Popular Front. Instead of a war against ALL the bourgeoisie they wanted a war against the Nationalists first and hoped to save the real class war for the future. Thus they all supported the Popular Front governments, all wanted to limit the general strike of 1936 to factories which made no contribution to the war effort and they all called for "defence of the revolution" rather than make the real revolution against the bourgeois state in its democratic form (See the evidence of the ex-Trotskyist participant Grandizo Munis in his book "Jalones de Derrota"). One thing that the Spanish War proves above all others is that the proletariat in this century can no longer follow the politics of the lesser evil i.e. support for the left of the bourgeoisie against the right. The only path to the emancipation of the working class lies in the struggle on its own terrain and for its own interests.

And to fight for its own interests it is essential that the working class creates the basic form of political organisation which leads the ideological fight against all bourgeois ideologies and acts as a practical guide in the vital moments when proletarian action on a wide scale is possible. The International Communist Left were correct in the course of the Spanish war to point to the absence of such an organisation - a fact which was indicative of the depth of the counter-revolution over the working class everywhere following the defeat of the post-war revolutionary wave in the 1920s. It also shows that political consciousness of

the working class cannot be a mere passive product of the economic conditions of the time. In the 1930s the Spanish proletariat faced enormous economic hardships (e.g. unemployment amongst Barcelona building workers in 1936 was 70%) and this produced a militant and heroic capacity for united action on a class basis but it was not sufficient for the Spanish working class to see through the pretensions of the PSOE, CNT and PCE which they considered to be their real representatives. Proletarian political consciousness therefore has to be fought for, whatever the economic conditions that are confronting the working class. This remains the major task of communists today. It is the prime activity of the International Bureau of the Revolutionary Party to which the CWO is affiliated. The future Party of the proletariat must be international and it must be the expression of the independent struggles of the working class capable of understanding the vital lessons of the struggles of the past and applying those lessons to today's working class practice.

## SPAIN FIFTY YEARS AFTER

Today in Spain as in 1936 we find the "socialists" of the PSOE in power, with Felipe Gonzalez doing precisely the same job (albeit with different rhetoric) for the bourgeoisie as Largo Caballero did fifty years ago. However signs remain that the workers are no longer taken in by talk of not striking against a "socialist" government. In the car factories of Valencia and especially in the shipyards of Giron the Spanish working class have spearheaded the resistance to the austerity measures which the crisis of profitability of Spanish capital has forced the bourgeoisie in Spain to resort to. The only force capable of carrying this out (precisely because of its supposed record in the Spanish War) is the PSOE. By keeping the left in power (as in the recent elections) the Spanish bourgeoisie hopes to carry its austerity plans still further and has recognised that the PSOE has been relatively successful. For their part the workers of Giron have shown that they are as capable as laying down their lives to defend their conditions of existence as their proletarian ancestors. Already they have responded to police tear gas by arming themselves. However the chief weapon of the working class is its capacity for self-organisation. Once the workers everywhere are struggling simultaneously and in solidarity with each other organised under the leadership of their own party they will be irresistible.

Then the nostalgia of the Spanish War will be recognised for the nightmare it was and its memory can be expunged altogether by the deeds of the proletariat of the present.

# IRELAND

Continued from p8

Contract" in Britain, and the Irish equivalent, the series of National Pay Rounds, both prove that the unions are prepared to sell the decaying system of which they are an integral part.

Essentially, it is this negotiating role which dictates the anti-working class nature of the unions today, whether their leaders are 'left' or 'right', 'militant' or 'moderate'. Such subjective factors can only influence whether or not a particular union is explicit in its co-operation with the state, or whether it is generally 'bureaucratic' or 'democratic'. The politics of the leadership cannot make any union a working class organisation when the only lasting gain left to be made is in the socialist revolution.<sup>1</sup>

## THE REVOLUTIONARY ALTERNATIVE

The problems of union sabotage faced recently by Irish workers are the problems of the class internationally, as capitalism relentlessly steps up its attacks. The CWO's only special call on the workers of Ireland is to utterly reject the sectarian filth of both shades of nationalism, which attempts to persuade us that gains are to be had by affiliating to one or other capitalist nation-state. Otherwise, we repeat our call to workers everywhere:

- \* Agitate for all struggles to be put under the control of an elected strike committee responsible to and recallable by a mass assembly of all workers involved.
- \* Do not be content with union style token picketing. Extend solidarity action beyond factory gates and industry boundaries to include all workers (including the unemployed).
- \* Fight against the unions for an effective struggle against the bosses. Ignore union ballots and delaying tactics.
- \* Expose the union manoeuvres to sabotage the struggle to the whole of the workforce. Help build a network of internationalist factory groups fighting for a communist perspective within the workplaces.<sup>2</sup>

Far from being 'unrealistic' or 'utopian' acts, these are the first steps in a real workers fightback against capitalism's attacks.

## NOTES:

1. For a more detailed explanation of the CWO's position on trade unions see the text "Marxism and the Trade Union Question" in Revolutionary Perspectives n°20.
2. For more information on Factory Groups and Unemployed Workers Groups see our Platforms available from the CWO's addresses.

## CWO PUBLIC MEETING.

"The Communist Position on the Nature of the Soviet Union."

Saturday 6th September at 7.30 p.m.  
The Crown, The Old Market, BRISTOL.

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23

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## REVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVES

19



Journal of the Communist Workers Organisation



# RUSSIA RE-MYSTIFIED

## THE RCP'S NEW APOLOGY FOR STATE CAPITALISM

THE SOVIET UNION DEMYSTIFIED by Frank Furedi  
a Junius Publication.

This book is the latest offering from the so-called "Revolutionary Communist Party", a Trotskyist organisation that till now has been rather reticent on certain fundamental issues, such as the nature of the Soviet social system. With this work, their weightiest attempt yet to establish their theoretical credentials, they have tried to fill the gap. However, this publication situates the RCP more firmly than ever in the Trotskyist tradition of vulgarisers of Marxism, for whom the Soviet Union is a transitional mode of production, a new social formation which is neither a workers' democracy nor capitalism. Such a political halfway house is incompatible with Marxism and provides a rationale for opportunism and political duplicity.

There are essentially three main planks to the RCP's arguments. The first is that the law of value no longer operates in the USSR, the second is that the bureaucracy does not constitute a ruling class, and the third is that the Soviet Union is not an imperialist power. In effect these positions cannot lead to the more effective critique of Stalinism that the RCP claim, but to an apology for, and political accommodation with it.

### THE LAW OF VALUE.

Discussing the industrialisation of the 1930's Furedi says,

"The death of the capitalist market also meant the passing of the law of value as the regulator of society's labour time. Instead of the market, a chain of command now determined the allocation of resources" (p.98).

To pursue this logic implies that communist relations of production could be implemented in the Soviet Union, if the bureaucracy so wished. But the capitalist market can and indeed largely has during world wars disappear without abolishing capitalism.

"The whole of the market relationship, except the market relations between capital and labour may disappear without affecting the capitalist form of production at all. The market relation between capital and labour is the only developed capitalist relation per se. Short of its abolition, the historically developed form of production called capitalism cannot disappear." (P. Mattick *Partisan Review* 1941).

The failure of the revolution in Russia to extend itself internationally, meant that communist relations of production could not be built, and that the forces of production could only be developed on a capitalist basis, albeit in the form of state capitalism. State directed accumulation, through forced rapid industrialisation, was possible in Russia for two reasons. Firstly because of the low organic composition of the national capital, and secondly because the peasantry could be forced to bear the brunt of the costs of accumulation, by being transformed into agricultural and industrial proletarians. This development of the productive forces made Russia the world's second industrial power, and at the same time bequeathed to it a very high organic composition of capital. For Marxists, this means that the Russian economy will experience the same tendency for the rate of profit to fall, as in the western economies. Such a conclusion cannot be demonstrated empirically due to the disguised nature of commodity production, and the absence of accounting in strict profit terms, but nothing else can explain declining Soviet growth rates, except falling profit rates, and these stem from the operation of the law of value in the Russian economy. The effects of this law may have appeared to all but disappear in the autarchy of the 1930's, but the need to replace obsolete constant capital, by importing western technology, has meant the competitive re-emergence of the Soviet Union onto the world market. In other words, Russian economic growth is not planned by the

bureaucrats in the Kremlin, but by world capitalism.

According to Furedi,

"Soviet workers do not sell their labour-power, labour power is not a commodity, and there is no market in labour. Nor do Soviet workers earn wages in the same way as workers in the west; the relationship between wages and living standards that prevails under capitalism has been substantially modified in the Soviet Union."

The analysis of the nature of Russia however, cannot begin from the sphere of circulation, but must be sought in the process of production and accumulation. For us the capitalist nature of Russia is defined by the commodity character of labour power, by the separation of the producers from the means of production and the accumulation of capital based on the extraction of surplus value from labour power. In Russia the producers are wage-labourers, exchanging their only commodity against a wage, which they in turn exchange for other commodities which ensure their existence. This relationship is the backbone of the capitalist nature of the whole economy.

"Thus capital pre-supposes wage-labour: wage labour pre-supposes capital. They reciprocally condition each other, they reciprocally bring each other forth." Marx, in *Wage Labour and Capital*.)

Despite wage fixing, and attempts to prevent or enforce the movement of labour (both of which existed in Nazi Germany without making it non-capitalist), wage labour has never been other than a commodity in Russia, hence the surplus for accumulation has taken the form of surplus value, and this expansion the form of capitalist accumulation.

### THE QUESTION OF CLASS.

Having added nothing to the worm eaten corpus of Trotskyism on the law of value, the RCP try to add a new twist to the question of the class nature of the bureaucracy. Along with the classic position of their current they reject the view that the bureaucracy is, or can become, a class, because of its "insecure grip on the surplus fund", ie its lack of overt ownership. They also reject the view that the bureaucracy is a caste, and claim that it is best described as a "political order", which is merely an impressionistic evasion of analysis. The formalistic separation of political from economic processes which this implies, ignores the fact that there has never been a phase of capitalism where the exploitation of the working class has not been ensured by its political subordination. Weak national capitals, like Russia, require a ruthless political control over their value producers in order to survive on the world market.

The RCP follow Trotsky in arguing that the bureaucracy is not a class since it is not hereditary, and since it does not legally own the means of production. But this is beside the point. A ruling class is defined by its function as the collective disposer of the surplus created by the labour of the exploited class. Thus bishops, abbots etc. in the Middle Ages, disposed of feudal property by function of their office, as did the officials in Oriental Despotism. A class is only defined in terms of its recruitment or legal position in bourgeois sociology. For Marxists, what constitutes a class is its position in the process of production and re-production. In this sense the state bureaucracy in Russia constitutes a ruling class.

### IS THE SOVIET UNION IMPERIALIST?

The RCP feel that the relations between Russia and the west are of a different kind from those traditional between imperialist powers. Let us allow them to speak for themselves,

"It is clear that the conflict in

East-West relations is of a different order from the rivalries that wax and wane in relations among imperialist powers. Despite the many points of East-West conflict, the Soviet Union is committed to preserving the existing divisions of the world."

Again this is a fallacy, that ignores the imperialist imperative for Russia, because it ignores the accumulation problems of state capitalism. Russia emerged at the end of WWII as an imperialist power of the first order, extending its control over E. Europe and temporarily over Manchuria. These areas were partly simply looted, and partly had to pay heavy reparations. Today Russian imperialism's private fiefdom is the Comecon bloc, which functions as a huge captive market for the Soviet Union. It is due to its vast trade surplus with the Comecon states, that Russia is able to run an equally large deficit with the west. Many east European states would prefer to trade freely on the world market, but the use of the non-convertible ruble as a means of Comecon trade (not to mention Russian tanks) prevents this.

The basic pattern of Russian aid is imperialist. In return for military and economic aid Russia maintains a dominant hold over its clients' economies. Thus the Cuban sugar crop has been mortgaged to Russia for decades, and in Angola 90% of the fishing rights are in Russia's hands. The basic pattern of Russian trade is also imperialist, ie of unequal exchange. Russia imports raw materials from the peripheral regions at less than their domestic value, and exports machinery in return at above their domestic value, thus increasing the profitability of the home economy.

For the RCP, the contradictions between East and West are "episodic and conjunctural", the real contradictions being those between the likes of the USA, Japan and W. Germany. A statement such as this can only be based on a profound misreading of the whole of the history of the post war era, which has seen the development of a constellation of states around two antagonistic poles of interest. One is dominated economically and militarily by the USA, the other by Russia, and it is the conflicts within these blocs that are episodic.

### CONCLUSION.

The political standpoint of the RCP is not clearly delineated in this work, but between the lines we can see them, as are all Trotskyists, as critical defenders of the Soviet Union, touting themselves as advisers to the "political order" in Russia. This can be seen in statements like the following,

"The Soviet bureaucracy's main hope for the future lies in rising inter-imperialist competition. This will weaken the external threat to the Soviet Union, and allow the bureaucracy to play opponents off against one another. Gorbachev has already embarked on such a course though so far with limited results." (p.246).

This attempt to re-mystify the Soviet Union, certainly has produced limited results, in that it contains nothing new to add to the tortured apologetics of Trotskyism for the Soviet social system. Lurking below the surface are all the classic assumptions of that tradition; that Russia is a transitional society that can be reformed into socialism, and that in its conflicts with the west it deserves the support of revolutionaries. But for revolutionary Marxists, the capitalist nature of Russia means that a social revolution is necessary to destroy it, and that in its conflicts with western imperialism, revolutionary defeatism is the communist perspective. This book nails the RCP's colours to the mast, as opponents of such a materialist position.



# WORKERS VOICE

## IRELAND NORTH AND SOUTH UNIONS ORGANISE DEFEAT

In the first week of July the all-Ireland Irish Congress of Trade Unions held its annual conference in Belfast. As well as echoing all the leftist phrasemongering of its British counterpart, the governing body also reviewed its record in the handling of recent strike activity, as the ICTU has an even more prominent role in the dis-organisation of the class struggle than the TUC.

The hearty condemnation of "discredited monetarism" accompanied by calls for a return to the glories of failed Keynesian intervention are familiar enough. Similarly, an explicit desire to avoid the "constitutional question" of the status of Northern Ireland contrasted with the Congress' headlong leap into the equally reactionary nationalism of "national interest" politics. McCusker, president of the ICTU, displayed his credentials in the central address of the meeting when he called on both British and Irish governments to step up exploitation of his members: "As we have to compete in today's highly competitive international economy, we cannot afford not to make the best possible use of our most precious resource, namely our workforce."

The desire of the unions to aid "national recovery", with the working class picking up the tab in the form of increasing austerity, will come as no surprise to the latest victims of union tactics. Recent struggles North and South have demonstrated how these tactics seek to keep the workers within the bounds of ruling class legality, while at the same time derailing any chance of an effective fightback against the bosses by isolating strikers both geographically and by industry.

### UNION COMPROMISE EQUALS UNION SABOTAGE

The eve of the ICTU conference witnessed the end of two significant strike movements in Belfast itself. After two months on strike which had seen drivers at the Royal Victoria Hospital confront the armed RUC on the picket lines, the Congress successfully negotiated a return to work just when solidarity from other

ancillary staff was beginning to become more tangible and effective. The strike began in response to new conditions proposed by the management and represented a pre-emptive action by the workers to fight the probable redundancies resulting from the package. With regard to demands, the unions achieved precisely nothing but claimed a victory in the winning of an "independent" inquiry into the dispute.

A similar "compromise" took place in a seven week province wide strike by 1,500 bus drivers, with its most militant support in Belfast's Citybus depots. In a tactic reminiscent



Workers must struggle against the unions too!

of the miners' strike, the energies of the workers were first sapped by an overtime ban before the strike "proper" was conducted in a series of token one day Friday stoppages which were announced to the management well in advance. The one "achievement" of the union settlement was a marginally increased pay offer of 5.4%, while the strings attached included acceptance of flexible rostering and compulsory overtime - the very issues which had provoked the strike in the first place!

If the workers in the North faced demoralisation and division at the hands of the capitalist left, Dublin Corporation manual workers also faced the direct power of the Irish state in their three week pay strike in June. The use of troops to smash strikes has been a regular option for bosses in Ireland over the last decade, with busmen, firemen, sewage workers and tanker drivers all facing such centrally organised scabbing on more than one occasion. This time they had been brought in to clear rubbish in Dublin, a task which they had experience of under previous regimes in 1979 and 1982.

In this struggle however a section of the 4,200 workers on strike demonstrated that they were prepared to put up more than token resistance to the attempts of capitalism to impose cuts in their standard of living. As the clearing operation began on the night of June 5th, strikers clashed with police, some in riot gear, who were escorting the army convoys, and later set fire to huge mounds of rubbish, damaging a local shopping centre.

However, it was then that the unions displayed their policing role for capitalism when officials intervened in force to calm the picket. Later the unions "condemned" the use of the army while showing their contempt for any worker who attempted to put up effective resistance: "We do not want anyone saying Dublin

Corporation workers cannot conduct themselves with dignity".

With the union at the helm, the strike could only ever be led to negotiations and eventual defeat. The other option for the strikers was to organise outside of the union structure altogether, and appeal to other workers to join the struggle and raise their own demands. At the same time, a similar group of low paid state employees, 14,000 Telecom Eireann workers, has been in dispute. As this article goes to press the TE workers are on the verge of strike action, but face the same fate of isolation as the Dublin Corporation workers unless the lessons of that struggle can be grasped.

The details of the Dublin Corporation "compromise", which came on June 16th, were again typically surrounded with union jargon of management concessions on "principles", attempting to disguise the absence of any real substance to the agreement. A below the rate of inflation management offer of a 7% pay increase over eighteen months was replaced by lump-sum payments of £5 and £6 over the same period, representing a percentage increase of 8.2%.

The only response from the ICTU conference on this series of minute gains (or defeats in real terms) was an attempt to grip the workers struggles in an even tighter vice. Congress endorsed a call for a reappraisal and strengthening of the system of ICTU "all-out" pickets, which was said to have been abused in recent disputes. In the unions' self-imposed two-tier picketing system the "all-out" is the mechanism through which solidarity action is organised, and the Congress itself is the only body which can grant it. The decision at this year's conference effectively means that strike movements will be deliberately isolated and emasculated to an even greater extent than previously, as the ICTU increases its control.

### THE ROLE OF THE UNIONS

For communists, the whole spectrum of counter-revolutionary activities which the unions participate in, from the derailment of the class struggle to the involvement in semi-state bodies and even governments, are not the result of malicious leadership (as the Trotskyists claim) but of their objective function in the era of capitalist decadence.

By definition the aim of trade unionism is to negotiate for better terms for the sale of workers labour power. But crisis-ridden capitalism is now unable even to maintain living standards over any length of time, and unions are left with the problem of how to get workers to accept the bosses attacks via real wage cuts, redundancies and so on. The explicit period of wage restraint initiated by the "Social

Continued on p6

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