

WORKERS VOICE

COMMUNIST
WORKERS
ORGANISATION

CONTENTS

Thatcherism	2	Mexican Strikes	6
DHSS Strike	3	Indian Communists	7
Caterpillar	3	Gramsci and the Left ..	8
JULY DAYS 1917	4		

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AGAINST CAPITALIST ELECTIONS! FOR WORKERS DEMOCRACY!

A government presiding over the highest unemployment total for half a century, that has inflation running at three times the level of West Germany and the USA, that has cut private housebuilding by a third and public housebuilding by a half, that has cut 10% of hospital beds and raised taxation by 10% since 1979 should have really been quaking at the "peoples verdict" in the General Election. Instead they are the most likely winners and it is their opponents who are trying to salvage their reputations. Why is this the case?

ELECTIONS - THE PEOPLES VERDICT?

This is a lie because the election only acts to mask the dictatorship of the propertied classes over the working classes. The capitalists who control all the means of information (and disinformation) long ago decided that they wanted the return of a Tory government. This is why the media are filled with stories (put out by the CBI) of a booming economy around the corner, this is why the unemployment issue is played down along with the scandal of Tory MPs lining their pockets from privatisation and this is why the Labour Party are portrayed as incompetent and divided. The Labour Party's feebleness in opposition is only a mystery to those who think the Labour Party is in some way a workers party. It is not. It also accepts the same rules of the game as the Tories and would not alter their legislation on privatisation. The main difference is that Labour failed in the 1970s where the Tories have succeeded in the 1980s.

After all the Tories have smashed some of the most militant workers in British industry and imposed the biggest rise in productivity (i.e. exploitation) since the Second World War. Why should the capitalists abandon them especially since there is no immediate threat of social revolt which requires them to call in "the peoples party" on the horizon? Thus the opinion polls continue to underline the message that the Conservatives are the most popular faction in order to create the right climate for their victory.

WHATEVER THE VOTE CAPITALISM ALWAYS WINS

This brings us to the second lie concerning capitalist elections. Britain might not have a one party state but that is only part of the disguise of the capitalist dictatorship. All the parties are capitalist parties. They all stand for the system of exploitation. The Opposition parties only act as a safety valve which capitalism offers whenever the electorate becomes disillusioned with the government of the day. However it is very useful for the capitalists to be able to hold an election offering these false alternatives and to be then able to say that anti-capitalist forces have no support in

Britain. Given the length of time it would take to build up that support and given that it would face the hostile ridicule of the capitalist press club (which a capital of £6 million is not enough to enter as Eddie Shah and News on Sunday have found out) it is impossible to attack capitalism in this way. Left groups who stand in capitalist elections only emphasise their own weakness and give credibility to the capitalist dictatorship. In fact there is nothing better for confirming Marx's observation of 1843 that in every epoch the ruling ideas are those of the dominant class than a capitalist election.

SO WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE TO VOTING IN THE CAPITALIST ELECTION?

Present-day society is founded on the class antagonism of the workers and the capitalists - an antagonism which often bursts out into open class war such as the miners strike, the printers battle at Wapping and in many other ways in all countries. This continual antagonism ensures that the ruling ideas are never, even at their most triumphant, totally dominant and gives birth to working class ideas i.e. to a communist consciousness. However this consciousness can only be held by small minorities so long as all the apparatus of repression and control of information rests in the hands of the capitalist state. It is only when capitalism can no longer guarantee its wage slaves even a miserable existence that the possibility of its overthrow is possible. And here the action of the masses is decisive. No longer atomised in the secrecy of the ballot box (which their ancestors fought for without understanding that it would become one more weapon for the class enemy). No longer weighed down by the immediate problems of paying bills, rents and mortgages the workers can unite in MASS ASSEMBLIES in which they will gain confidence for action from each other and proceed, under the guidance of their most daring and farsighted comrades (who will be grouped around a communist party) to the overthrow of capitalist class rule, the destruction of the capitalist state, its police, its law courts, its army and its political parties and its media.

THE WORKERS ALTERNATIVE

To replace the capitalist dictatorship will be a workers democracy which will be a dictatorship of the proletariat OVER THE CAPITALIST CLASS but which will also be the condition of the widest freedom for all non-exploiters.

This isn't a utopia dreamed up in the abstract but has actually happened in working class struggles over the last century and more. As early as the Paris Commune of 1871 the working class had shown its ability to govern itself and demonstrated the essential

difference between parliamentary and workers democracy.

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

the Commune was based on DELEGATES and not, as MPs are today, representatives. Instead of just casting a vote and leaving politics to the politicians the workers elected delegates to the Commune who could be recalled AT ANY TIME. In addition the police and standing army were abolished and replaced by a workers militia thus ensuring that the force of the state was wielded by the arms of the workers.

In 1905 and again in 1917 the Russian working class revived the basis of the Commune when they created SOVIETS (in English, councils) of Workers to replace capitalist state power. Delegates were elected by mass assemblies to carry out the orders of the workers who have elected them and could be recalled immediately they failed to do so. Councils would not only pass laws but would also carry them out. Obviously the Russian workers in isolation could not maintain Russia as the first workers state in history and with the deaths of the best workers in the civil war which followed the Russian revolution the power of the councils was supplanted by that of the party-state of the present Moscow regime. Today the myth that Russia is a workers state is used by all capitalist factions to prove that capitalist parliamentary democracy is preferable to a so-called 'communist' dictatorship. The USSR might be a dictatorship but it is not communist nor is it a workers state. Like all other capitalist countries it has a ruling class which exists on the exploitation of the working class. The tasks of Russian workers are therefore no different from those in Western Europe. For all of us the capitalist state must be destroyed before we can hope to fight within the workers councils for new non-exploitative society. World capitalism has got some time to go before its crisis develops to the point where workers will be forced to destroy it to defend their own interests. In the meantime it is the task of communists to fight in every struggle of the working class, to lead those struggles to an awareness of the longer-term interests of the working class in a society which produces for need and not for profit. It is the task of communists to form the international workers party both by confronting the ideas of other communists to achieve greater understanding of the nature of our tasks and to regroup with elements which display sufficient enough agreement to create a solid pole of attraction around which working class militants can rally. This is the task which the International Bureau (to which the CWO adheres) has set itself. Join us!

THESES ON THATCHERISM

The experience of almost a decade of Thatcherite political and economic policies, and the likelihood of at least another term of the same, requires the phenomenon to be put into the historical perspective of a communist analysis. Even though it is an accident that this particular historical nonentity has given her name to the period, the role she has fulfilled has not been an accidental one for British capitalism, but finds its rationale in the response of the British bourgeoisie to the crisis.

When the "Thatcherite Revolution" began, there were many in the communist camp who regarded it as a freak, and felt that all that was required, was to await her inevitable U-turn, since Thatcher's economic policies (her declared opposition to "socialism", ie., state capitalism) ran counter to the trend of the epoch towards, so the story ran, the increasing of state control and ownership. But for the Falklands war, or some other factor, this U-turn would have occurred ere now, so continues the tale. But 5 years after "The War of Thatcher's Face", the bourgeoisie shows no sign of weakening in its support for her policies; quite the contrary, the dominant sections of the bourgeoisie are MORE behind Thatcher now than in 1979.

Thus we present, as a focus for discussion, the following "Theses on Thatcherism". Polemical and empirically underdeveloped as they may be, they can nevertheless provide a focus for a fuller understanding of the evolution of British capitalism in the 1980's, and its likely development into the 1990's.

C.W.O.

1. There is a constant need for communists to study reality and re-examine their positions. Fear of doing so results from the erroneous view that tactics and strategy are programmatic issues, which cannot be altered or even questioned, without bringing the whole revolutionary project into question.
2. In particular, after almost 20 years of chaos in the capitalist economy, it is necessary to re-examine perspectives for the evolution of the crisis and bourgeois strategies of "crisis management".
3. It is now clear that simplistic views of a fairly rapid evolution of capitalism towards collapse, with generalised immiseration, and rising class struggle, and ever greater steps towards state capitalism, are at least open to question.
4. The contours of the present crisis—though much work remains to be done—bear more similarities to that of the "Great Depression" of 1873-96, than to the inter-war capitalist collapse. We have begun to analyse the consequences of this for issues such as class composition, the crisis and living standards elsewhere.
5. The context of our immediate political work is that of British capitalism and its specific reaction to the crisis. Therefore it is necessary to analyse the political meaning of the Thatcher years, in particular in relation to the question of state capitalism.
6. It was assumed by communists, that the reaction of each national bourgeoisie to the crisis would be to intensify state capitalism, to strengthen state control in an attempt to protect the national capital against the worst aspects of the economic crisis. We need not go into the details of this, nor bother with those who now claim never to have had such an analysis.
7. It is now clear that the economic policies of the Thatcher governments have been to reverse the trend towards state capitalism. By this we do not only mean—though we include—the trend towards privatisation of the nationalised industries. This has reduced state ownership of the British economy from around 20% to less than 10% in both value and people employed in less than a decade.
8. We are not concerned with the economics of privatisation here (we have covered it elsewhere). But Thatcherism has shown that the assumption that the state would take over and defend those sections of the national economy which were unprofitable, but supposedly essential—heavy industry, etc., is flawed.
9. But Thatcherism has not only failed to defend the national capital in its nationalised sector, but along the entire industrial front which has lost around 35% of its labour force since 1979. Current industrial production in Britain is lower than in 1979, the only major OECD country where this is the case.
10. Thatcherism represents the surrender to the third-worldisation, the tertiarisation, of the U.K. economy. British industry, unlike its competitors, receives little or no protection against dumping via any kind of disguised protectionism, or through financial aid. The encouragement of the recent take over mania which encouraged asset stripping and the closure of rival plants, is further evidence of this.
11. The few growth sectors in the British economy are almost entirely foreign owned. Over 80% of the microelectronics industry is U.S. owned, for example. The massive aid given to Nissan to establish a plant in Britain, and the sale of Leyland trucks to DAF are further examples of the lack of will of Thatcherism to maintain national control of key sectors of the economy.
12. Though we are calling these developments by the name of "Thatcherism", we are not falling into the leftist trap of seeing this as some kind of product of the psychological derangement of one, or a few, individuals in the Tory party. Nor do we fall for the slightly more sophisticated version of a government subservient to "City" interests. As always, the government represents the national capital, though it may trample on the toes of individual capitalists.
13. In a world saturated with excess capital, certain capitals, for specific economic and historical reasons, could not compete; Britain and Italy both nearly went to the wall in the 1970's. Today capitalism's ability to bale out major national capitals is much more restricted; witness the rumous of trade wars between Japan, the USA and the EEC.
14. The British bourgeoisie has been driven to the view, that it is unable to compete in the international capitalist market, as one of the major capitalist powers. The country which was the pioneer of capitalism, and whose currency was till the 60's a reserve currency, is now no longer even one of the world's top six industrial powers, having been overtaken by Italy. Thatcherism has achieved an economic turnaround of massive proportions; for the first time since the middle of the eighteenth century, Britain has a massive and growing balance of payments deficit on manufactured goods.
15. As the weakest of the main capitalist powers, the British bourgeoisie could hardly have prevented this—except by economic measures which would not have been tolerated by the other countries in its "bloc" (massive devaluation and stringent import controls—the Bennite recipe). But the specificities of British capital meant that it had an option, only much less strongly available to other powers. This was to fund its deficit on goods and thus avoid bankruptcy, by expanding its earnings from other areas, mainly services and agriculture. The latter, for example, is the largest recipient of government aid in Britain in absolute terms (though employing only 10% of those employed in industry), and is now Britain's second export earner.
16. The abolition of controls on capital export has raised overseas lending as a percentage of GNP, to levels not seen since W.W.I. This is largely portfolio investment in the stronger capitalist countries, such as the USA and those of the EEC. The earnings from these capital exports, plus those from invisible earnings like banking, insurance, consultancy (always a traditional stronghold of the City) and of course from tourism (not to mention the freak bonanza of North Sea Oil—75% exported) have all meant that the British bourgeoisie as a whole could be won over to the idea of the abandonment of large areas of its industrial activity. The C.B.I. is as enthusiastically behind Thatcher, despite the wails of Labour that industry will be better treated by them, as is the Institute of Directors, the City and the Big Banks.
17. "Thatcherism" therefore, represents, not the restoration of British industrial greatness, but the abandonment of the British bourgeoisie of any attempt to maintain its position on the world market as a specific national capital, the surrendering of its economic independence. Its vision is of the U.K. as a parasitic, rentier economy, existing courtesy of the rest of the international bourgeoisie in a neo-comprador fashion.
18. But just as Thatcherism is not to be understood as the product of stupidity or malevolence on the economic front, but as a strategy for survival for British capitalism as a whole, so Thatcher's policies towards the working class must be seen as an attempt to defuse and control the class struggle in a period of economic transition.
19. Thatcher and the sections of capital which she represents certainly hate the working-class, and would love to have a "capitalism without workers", were that possible. However, it is not, and the ruling class strategy towards the proletariat must be seen as more than simply a bludgeon wielded in hatred.
20. Thatcherism represents the attempt to divide the working class into differentiated and manageable sectors, whose political and social threat has become neutered. In essence, it aims to return Britain to the class structure of the nineteenth century, which was comprised of an aristocracy of labour sympathetic to capitalism, a middle strata of shifting, under-employed and disorganised workers, and a vast reserve army of unemployed. Alongside this has been the attempt—in stark contrast to other capitalisms, eg France, to expand the petty-bourgeoisie.
21. The strategy of "People's Capitalism", which we have analysed elsewhere, with its council house sales and share ownership schemes, is an attempt to weld the highly-skilled sections of the class to capital, by giving them the idea that they are sharing in its fortunes. While this section of the class may have experienced increased productivity under Thatcher, for most of them living standards have been at least maintained.
22. The economic brunt of Thatcherism has fallen much harder on the middle strata of the class, which is experiencing the spread of short term and part time working, and the gradual erosion of job security and fringe benefits through Thatcher's attempts to make the labour market more flexible. Fear of unemployment, legal factors and so forth, make it very difficult for this strata to fight back.
23. But, as we have pointed out in our empirical studies, the real victims of Thatcherism are the growing mass of unemployed and semi-lumpenised elements, old, sick, young etc. who are experiencing rapid absolute and relative pauperisation. This ghettoised reserve army, in the Falls, in Brixton or wherever, is simply met with outright state repression.
24. The state fostered expansion of the petty bourgeoisie is also an effort to expand the social base of the pro-capitalist population. Partly it is an attempt to meet the "need" for new services, partly since the cost to capital of subsidising a petty bourgeois is less than maintaining an unemployed person.
25. Altogether, Thatcherism is no aberration, but an attempt, born out of the specific situation of British capitalism, to develop an economic and social strategy for survival.

Continued on Back Page

CLASS STRUGGLE IN BRITAIN

UNITY ON THE PICKET LINES AT DHSS

The present Civil service dispute is a clear example of how unions respond from pressure from below in organising struggles and leading them...to defeat, unless workers regain the initiative, and take their struggle outside the union framework.

In recent years workers on both sides of dole office counters have faced massive attacks from the bosses. On one side, there have been cuts in real wages and speed-ups (today there are 125 claimants per staff member, as opposed to 100 in 1979). On the other side, there has been an annual cut in real benefits thinly disguised as an annual increase. Affecting both sides, there has been the introduction of the Special "Snooper" Squad, especially constituted to sniff out clerical discrepancies indicating "fraudulent" claims. A real material basis clearly exists for a united struggle of claimants and civil servants.

If the unions were the defensive organs of the working class that their left wing supporters say they are, they would encourage this struggle. Instead, the union officials - including John Ellis, Secretary General of the CPSA - ask NALGO workers to refuse to make emergency payments to the unemployed, though he is quite happy to leave the Customs and Excisemen in position at the ports, collecting revenue for the bosses' state and simmering over their own greivances, which have led to several short-term stoppages and working to rule in recent months.

If the unions were the fighting organs of the working class instead of bourgeois brokers whose bargaining point is workers' labour power, then they would have learned from the demoralising experience of the 1981 selective action that an all-out strike was necessary. Instead they draw the lesson that a "rolling" dispute is required to flatten the workers' anger, and they put forward plans for regional 2-day strikes to supplement a 2-day national strike.

If the unions were fighting organs of the working class, then they would not recommend a Labour vote in the coming election, and would recognise elections as one of the methods by which the ruling class attacks the working class, by fostering the illusion that workers can exercise influence in society without class struggle. By fostering the illusion that the coming to power of a party whose last period in power coincided with the trebling of unemployment is in the interest of the working class. Moreover, in this particular struggle, calls to vote Labour prepare the way for Labour's preferred solution: Macdonald, Labour's Civil Service spokeswoman, has said that a Labour government would refer the dispute to arbitration. As ACAS is a government body, this means that the workers should ask their employer to say what their wages should be!

THE WAY FORWARD

While the Labour Party sheds crocodile tears over "Tory unemployment", conveniently forgetting the half that was "Labour unemployment, what should militants do? In some areas - Glasgow, Leeds and London - there has already been solidarity between claimants and strikers who have occupied Town Halls demanding emergency payments. Militants should build on these examples of solidarity. The way forward is for strikers and unemployed to join together in organising struggle committees, putting forward the demands of the both employed and unemployed, and spreading the struggle to other sectors of workers. Useful demands would be for an increase in supplementary benefit and the disbanding of the snooper squads. In this way "the reserve army of the unemployed" would reinforce picketlines at the ports and airports, and help persuade the Customs workers to come out on full strike. Their support is essential if the strike is to bite. Picket lines will also be needed at

the DHSS computer centres at Reading and elsewhere, as the bosses' have already threatened to recruit scabs if the programmers' support for the strike is solid. The bosses plan to computerise social security claims, and will easily be able to make 25 000 redundant if they win this struggle. Militants must be clear: the way forward is solidarity, between workers on both sides of the dole office counters.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNISTS

The role of communists is to link today's economic struggle with tomorrow's political struggle. This task has both propagandist and organisational aspects. We put forward tactics for the immediate struggle at the same time as pointing out that the crisis means that success in that struggle can at best mean a temporary respite, for the bosses are compelled by their economic crisis to attack the working class. The long-term defence of the workers' interests means smashing capitalism and replacing it with socialism. Organisationally, we seek to build politically aware Communist Factory and Unemployed Groups, as well as the communist party itself, so that the voice of the bourgeoisie in the working class is answered by the genuine voice of the working class. Again we say: Bring the unemployed into the struggle! Make it an all-out strike!

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UNIONS CRAWL AT CATERPILLAR

At the time of going to press the union-inspired "working party" is still floundering around trying to find a buyer for Scotland's largest factory - the doomed Caterpillar Plant. With the market for earth-moving equipment shrinking they are likely to have a long wait. As yet another section of workers in manufacturing troop off to the end of the dole queue chuckles of satisfaction can be heard at Caterpillar US headquarters, as this multinational proceeds with its global restructuring. So how did this struggle - after its initial dynamic of solid occupation - come to end in demoralisation and disarray?

It certainly wasn't due to a lack of commitment to the struggle or, indeed, of sympathy from other workers. Financial support was good, with £15,000 a week coming in from donations and street collections. What killed the strike was isolation, the lack of extension of the struggle, in short - trade unionist tactics. After the encouraging start workers followed the tactics of "New Realism", accepting 'support' from a motley of factions within the class enemy - from the churches, the nationalists, wet Tories and, of course, from the so-called 'Labour Movement'. There were fruitless lobbies of Parliament (5th March) and of the Scottish Labour Party Conference. The general attitude was summed up by a French CGT delegate who promised support "within the realities of the situation".

From the word go the unions took control of this strike and channelled it into ends that were always acceptable to the Company. All they had to do was sit back and wait; the unions did the rest. They made sure that solidarity from Caterpillar plants in Gosselies (Belgium) and Grenoble (France) was largely token and when the Leicester plant refused to accept replacement parts normally supplied from Uddingston, this was overturned by AEU officials. Support from outside was organised as long as it didn't threaten extension of the fight.

On April Fool's Day Airlie, Stalinist and veteran of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders' "Work-In" - another famous union "victory" - was sent in to tell the workers that their strike was "illegal"! The workers called his bluff and he was sent packing to stammer a few excuses in front of the waiting TV cameras. It was at this point that the bosses began to think of new tactics.

The union organised a mass meeting and shortly before it news was released that the plant had been "saved" by a mystery buyer and that 400 jobs were secure, with a prospect of another 400 some time later. The workers decided to end their occupation. Less than a week later Sir Monty Finniston, front man for this stunt (former BSC chief), together with the Edinburgh merchant banker backers for MPAT, announced that they were pulling out of the proposed venture. Later it was revealed that MPAT boss, McWatt, was a member of the right-wing group, the 46,000 strong US Defence Preparedness Association.

Today, more and more, workers are confronting the need to extend their struggle beyond their particular workplace and are learning through bitter experience that trade unionism is a tactical dead-end in the face of the cunning manoeuvres of the enemy. Caterpillar also reveals the degree to which elements within the British ruling class have become inveterate lackeys at the behest of their big brother, American Capital.

TOWARDS PROLETARIA

3. THE JULY DAYS

"THE PARTY MUST REMAIN WITH THE MASSES"

In winning the battle against the "Old Bolsheviks" (See WORKERS VOICE 34) Lenin and his supporters had successfully "rearmed" the Bolshevik party with a new programme which corresponded to the changed reality created by the February Revolution. How great a step forward this was for the Bolsheviks can be seen in the fact that Party membership leaped up and support for the Party in all proletarian organisations in Petrograd has generally been estimated at about 30% by May 1917. This in itself was a problem since the Bolsheviks were now the only organised force which called for an extension of the revolution and no cooperation with the bourgeois ministers of the Provisional Government. Many young workers who were impatient for action entered the party's ranks, particularly in to its Military Organisation and its Soldiers club, Club Pravda.

These new elements understood that the Bolsheviks stood for "All Power to the Soviets" and "Down with the Provisional Government". What they did not fully appreciate was that these were slogans of orientation. As Lenin stated in April

"The government must be overthrown, but not everyone understands this correctly. So long as the Provisional Government has the backing of the Soviet of Workers Deputies, you cannot 'simply' overthrow it. The only way it can and must be overthrown is by winning over the majority of the Soviets." (Coll Works Vol.24 p.146)

This piece of advice came in the wake of spontaneous demonstrations against the Milyukov Note (from the provisional Government's Foreign Minister telling the imperialist allies of Russia that, in spite of the Revolution, Russia would fight until victory). Many Bolsheviks, led by the St. Petersburg Committee (and supported by the Kronstadt sailors) had wished to turn into an armed insurrection since the masses had already taken up Lenin's slogans against the Provisional Government. Many Bolsheviks actually joined in the demonstrations. A few days later at the Seventh All-Russian Party Conference Lenin underlined the message

"The Government would like to see us make the first imprudent move towards revolutionary action... We cannot say that the majority is with us; what we need in the present situation is caution, caution, caution. To base proletarian tactics on subjective desires means to condemn them to failure."

Lenin then went on to criticise those Bolsheviks who had supported the workers use of the "Down with the Provisional Government" slogan against the Central Committee's insistence that only "Long live the Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies" was justifiable at the time. Lenin condemned this as "disorganisation", "a serious crime" concluding that "Our organisational apparatus is very weak - our decisions are not being carried out by everyone." But these were weaknesses of a proletarian party and reflected the unevenness of consciousness within the proletariat itself.

As 1917 wore on the the political fact that the Bolsheviks were uniquely proletarian became daily more clear. The Provisional Government had come into existence as a result of the February Revolution, itself the product of the collapse of the Russian economy after 1915. In February real wages had fallen to 1/3 of the prewar levels and despite large nominal increases for some workers the position was no better in July due to massive inflation.

Food prices were doubling approximately every month during 1917 and the fact that the Provisional Government was even worse at solving the transport question than Tsarism

meant that rations of bread were cut from 1lb a day to 3/4lb a day by April. Worse was to come since only 230 rail wagons containing food reached Petrograd each day in April 1917 compared with a daily total of 351 a year earlier. Only 1/3 of coal needs were reaching the capital by May and works like Putilov were closed for weeks on end in August and September. In addition to these temporary closures 568 factories collapsed leading to increased unemployment. Not surprisingly even more workers took part in strikes as the year wore on (rising from 35,000 in April to 1.2 million by October).

"Strikes were a politicising experience for those who took part in them; they saw with their own eyes how employers were going on investment strike, engaging in lockouts,... how the government was colluding with the employers, curbing the factory committees and sending troops to quell disorder... The strikes were important ... in making the policies of the Bolshevik Party attractive to them" (S.A. Smith RED PETROGRAD p.118 - all the figures are also taken from this source as well as M. Ferro THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION - A SOCIAL HISTORY p.160ff)

In addition the Provisional Government could not solve the two other desperate problems of Russia in 1917, that of land distribution and that of the war. Even the arrival of the supposed peasant party, the Social Revolutionaries, in the government did little to shake the landowners in the Provisional Government. This was because the SRs were sternly patriotic and tried to get the peasants to abandon their land seizures until "after the war". The peasants turned a deaf and carried out their own spontaneous reform by seizing the land and, where they met resistance, attacking the landlords. With such a narrow social base the Provisional Government (which had never been elected but was appointed from those elected to the Tsar's last parliament) was forced to rely on the Soviets. These in turn as we saw in Part One (see WORKERS VOICE 33) were dominated by the Mensheviks and SRs. Under their influence the Soviets had made "a voluntary surrender of state power to the bourgeoisie and its Provisional Government" (Lenin). And their political bankruptcy soon showed the Russian workers that there was only one political party which had a programme which defended their interests from the patriotism and abstract "marxism" of the Mensheviks and SRs.

This division was heightened in June 1917 at the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets. When the Menshevik minister Tsereteli announced that;

"At present moment there is no political party which would say: 'Give the power into our hands, go away, we will take your place.' There is no such party in Russia."

Lenin replied without standing that there was. (See E.H. Carr The Bolshevik Revolution Vol.1 p.100) The rest of the conference was a tussle between the Bolsheviks to get the other parties to vote for Soviet power and the overthrow of the Provisional Government. Having failed in the Congress to get the other parties to agree to this declaration of war on the government the Bolsheviks decided to put it to the masses by calling a demonstration for June 10th. The Soviet Executive denounced it and forced its abandonment (for which Lenin was severely attacked within the Party for vacillating). However Tsereteli overreached himself when he thought that by calling a massive demonstration in support of the Soviets for the following week this would reveal the weakness of the Bolsheviks. This turned out to be a massive misunderstanding of the mood of the Petrograd workers. When the demonstration took place on June 18th only a handful of banners expressed confidence in the Provisional Government (and, by

implication in Soviet support for it) whilst, according to the Menshevik Sukhanov, the slogans inscribed on them were 90% Bolshevik. This success was however to bring the Bolshevik Party to its severest test of 1917.

THE JULY DAYS

It used to be argued in bourgeois histories of the October Revolution that the July Days was a Bolshevik plot which went wrong (unlike October which was a successful coup of the same type). This was one of the main stays in the argument that Russia in 1917 was a power vacuum into which any determined band of gangsters could jump and seize power. However in the last ten years new evidence has been researched (particularly by A. Rabinowitch in his PRELUDE TO REVOLUTION) to demonstrate that the origins of the July Days lay in the spontaneous revolt of the 1st Machine Gun Regiment in Petrograd against an order sending them to the front to participate in the Provisional Government's June Offensive. Instead of trying to prevent an outbreak by this single regiment it seems that the Bolshevik Military Organisation, against all party discipline actually got carried along with the movement. Their paper, Soldatskaia Gazeta, called for the overthrow of the Provisional Government. They also helped to disseminate the news of the First Machine Gunners revolt to the working class Vyborg districts and to the naval base at Kronstadt. Here the Bolshevik representatives Raskolnikov and Roshal had already been warned by a telephone call from Kamenev to try to dampen down the movement. They were however unsuccessful and were only able to delay the sailors participating in a armed demonstration for a few hours. And when thousands of demonstrating workers arrived at the Bolshevik headquarters in Petrograd on the night of July 3rd both the Bolshevik Military Organisation and the Petrograd Committee agreed to support the demonstration and lead it on the streets.



Street-fighting in Petrograd during the 'July Days' of 1917.

The next day the Kronstadt sailors arrived fully armed at the Bolshevik headquarters. They and the thousands of workers and soldiers with them demanded that Lenin speak to them. Lenin had been absent from the capital for a few days rest when he had heard of the new movement. He had only returned a short time before. At first he was reluctant to speak to the demonstration but finally agreed to do so, murmuring to Podvoisky, leader of the Military Organisation, "you ought to be thrashed for this". His speech was a disappointment to the masses since he only called for a peaceful demonstration and implied that victory would be theirs "one day". To armed workers ready to finish off the class enemy there and then this was incomprehensible.

Lenin was criticised then and later for "an absence of leadership" by the more impatient elements of the Bolshevik Party. However to understand his position we must look at the reality of the situation in 1917. Though there can be little doubt that had the Bolsheviks led the demonstration to attack

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the Provisional Government on July 4th it would have collapsed then. However even if the Bolsheviks had overthrown the Provisional Government what would have happened then? They could not give the power to the Soviets since that was still dominated by the Menshevik/SR policy of support for the bourgeoisie (One Kronstadt sailor gave vent to the frustration of the workers with this policy when in the course of the roughing up of the SR leader Chernov he shouted "Take power you stupid bastard when it is being handed to you on a plate"). And the Bolsheviks could not yet hold power themselves since they did not command enough support even in the cities to be able to carry out their programme. As Lenin stated on many occasions both before and during this crisis

"...in order to gain power seriously (not by Blanquist methods), the proletarian party must fight for influence inside the Soviet, patiently, unswervingly, explaining to the masses from day to day the error of their petty-bourgeois illusions... Events should not be anticipated. Time is on our side." (Qu. Rabinowitch p.121-2)

This was what many in the Bolshevik Party overlooked. Burning with desire to rid themselves of the class enemy they did not see that subjective intention was not a sufficient condition for the victory of the working class.

However if Lenin was critical of the putschists and Blanquists within the Party he also recognised on July 4th that the class party has to remain with the class. This was also expressed by Raskolnikov in his memoirs of what had happened at Kronstadt. Despite Bolshevik arguments against the uprising,

"..for our party to have broken with the spontaneous movement of the Kronstadt masses would have struck an irreparable blow at its authority. On the other hand, an armed uprising would have been doomed to certain defeat. We might have seized power with comparative ease but would not have been in a position to retain it." (KRONSTADT AND PETROGRAD p.150)

As Lenin himself concluded two days after the crisis,

"Mistakes are inevitable when the masses are fighting but the communists REMAIN WITH THE MASSES, see these mistakes, explain them to the masses, try to get them rectified and strive perseveringly for the victory of class consciousness over spontaneity" (COLL. WORKS Vol 29 p.396)

This is perhaps the most fitting epitaph for the episode. The July Days showed that even against a bourgeoisie which was as weak, fragmented and politically bankrupt as that in Russia in 1917 the working class cannot overthrow it without uniting all its forces in a political instrument to lead that struggle, i.e. the political party. The Soviets, though the expression of the class-wide involvement of the working class are not the instrument for assault on bourgeois power since, as the experience of July shows, they contain elements which support that power. It was not the Provisional Government which was able to call up the troops which carried out the repression against the workers who took part in the July Days. It was the Menshevik/SR Executive of the Petrograd Soviet. Despite being an enormous setback in the short-term for the Bolsheviks the July Days also emphasised the proletarian nature of Bolshevism against the majority parties in the Soviet.

THE BOURGEOISIE FAIL TO CRUSH BOLSHEVISM

This was further underlined in the days which followed July. By circulating the lie that Lenin was a German spy and the Bolsheviks were paid by the Germans to disrupt the Russian army the Provisional Government many units in Petrograd now returned to barracks. At the same time the Provisional Government were not slow to use the support of the Executive Committee of the Soviet in bringing

back from the front troops loyal to the war effort. By the time Pravda announced the end to the demonstrations on July 5th the repression had already begun. The Pravda offices were seized and its printing presses smashed (Lenin having left shortly before the detachment from the Government arrived), the arrest of Lenin, Kamenev and Zinoviev was ordered and hundreds of Bolsheviks were rounded up and there were a number of lynchings of Bolsheviks. All kinds of reactionaries now crawled out of the woodwork to participate in the Bolshevik-baiting. In this they were egged on by the Menshevik leaders in the Provisional Government Tsereteli and Dan who even ordered the closing down of a Menshevik newspaper run by Gorky! This only added to the attacks on workers and soon the Mensheviks and SRs themselves were under attack from the anti-semitic and proto-fascist Black Hundreds that had been one of the instruments of terror used against workers under the Tsars. This blatant reaction however only served to underline the proletarian nature of the Bolshevik Party.

In fact though the Bolsheviks went through a temporary crisis of confidence in which some of their supporters in the factories dissociated themselves for a time from the Central Committee and even put themselves under the control of the Executive Committee of the Soviet, within a fortnight the worst was over. Given the bourgeoisie's murderous intentions and their belief that "The Bolsheviks are destroyed.." at this time it is remarkable that the Bolsheviks were able to survive at all.

The main reason lies in their support amongst the masses which though wavering at the edges during the repression, never cracked. The Bolsheviks had for too long championed proletarian interests particularly in the anti-war struggle for the masses to abandon them now. Equally the government blamed the July Days on the Bolsheviks alone but within the working class heartlands of Petrograd their suppression by a reactionary government for staying with the masses ultimately confirmed their proletarian support. Thus most of the 32,000 Bolsheviks in Petrograd were able to take refuge in the Vyborg and other working class districts where the Government forces dared not go. Although many factories were raided for weapons few were found and Kerensky (who became Prime Minister on July 7th) knew that it would risk full-scale civil war to try to go further. In addition the Soviet leaders were cautioning a halt to the repression since its reactionary nature was bound to help the proletariat see even more clearly that the Bolsheviks were the only genuine proletarian force in Russia at the time.

The feebleness of the repression against the Bolsheviks can be gauged by the fact that only one of the Central Committee was imprisoned (Kamenev) and though Lenin and Zinoviev remained in hiding until October they were still able to take part in party debates. As early as July 7th the Petrograd Committee were able to issue leaflets again and membership not only did not fall but was once again rising as soon as the skeleton of the Party apparatus was reorganised. On July 26th "in a spacious private assembly hall in the heart of the Vyborg District" the Bolshevik Party's 6th Congress opened and continued unmolested to debate the new course for the party for five days. The party had already learned the need for greater centralisation within its own ranks and the Military Organisation was put under closer supervision by the Party. Its paper was taken over by the Central Committee to replace Pravda and its leaders criticised for their adventurism in the July Days.

ALL POWER TO THE WORKERS

The main topic on the agenda was however the next step for the working class. Supporters of Lenin were circulating a text called "On Slogans". The main thrust of this was to say that the July Days had shown that a peaceful development of the revolution was no longer possible. It was no good hoping for the Soviets to simply replace the Provisional

Government since the SR/Menshevik leaders of the Soviets were hopelessly committed to the bourgeoisie. This point was fully shown by their support for Kerensky's repression against the working class instead of taking the power which the July demonstrators knew was there for the taking. From this Lenin concluded it was no point calling for "All Power to the Soviets" since it was clear that the Soviet actually was the biggest obstacle to this.

To all kinds of liberals, reactionaries and formalists Lenin's wish to drop the slogan is enough to confirm them in their belief that the Bolsheviks did not really believe in proletarian democracy. However this conclusion can only be reached by ignoring the framework of Lenin's argument and the nature of the debate on the subject in the weeks that followed. Lenin first of all made it clear that he would have preferred the Soviets to assume power whoever held the majority;

"Peaceful development would then have been possible, even in the sense that the struggle of classes and parties WITHIN the Soviets could have assumed a most peaceful and painless form, provided full state power had passed to the Soviets in good time." ("On Slogans" Sel. Works Vol 2 p.149)

But the key question which the class party must first consider is how to smash the last vestiges of bourgeois state power before the conditions for proletarian democracy can emerge. With the Soviet leadership entrenched in its support for the Provisional Government and with the Bolsheviks more widely supported in the factories than in the Soviet (some Mensheviks were already admitting that the Bolshevik support was not properly represented in the Soviet) Lenin concluded that the Soviet, at least for the time being was no use to the revolutionary proletariat. But he was not against the soviet principle;

"Soviets may appear in this new revolution, and indeed are bound to, but NOT the present Soviets, not organs collaborating with the bourgeoisie, but organs of revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie. It is true that even then we shall be in favour of building the whole state on the model of the Soviets. It is not the question of Soviets in general, but of combatting the PRESENT counter-revolution and the treachery of the PRESENT Soviets" (op. cit. p.153)

Lenin's opponents such as Volodarsky made it quite clear that they accepted Lenin's analysis of the Soviet's political nature but they did not accept that this would always remain the case. Being in Petrograd (and not in hiding in Finland) they could see that by the end of July Bolshevik support in the district Soviet was rising rapidly. Furthermore more and more Mensheviks were deserting their class-collaborationist party for the Bolsheviks. However it was agreed that a committee be set up to look at the question of the Party's slogans. Although this meant that the Bolsheviks did not call for "All Power to the Soviets" for a month it did not affect the work of building up support in the Soviets. The aim of the debate on slogans was to warn the whole party that the question of insurrection was increasingly imminent. The point had been made that

"...power is in the hands of a military clique of Cavaignacs (Kerensky, certain generals, officers etc.) who are supported by the bourgeois class headed by the Kadet Party..." (op. cit. p.152)

Cavaignac was the general who had butchered the Parisian workers in June 1848. The Russian bourgeoisie thought they had found their Cavaignac a month later in the person of General Kornilov. He was to provide the Bolsheviks with their third major test of 1917.

(To be continued)

THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN MEXICO

This report on the class struggle in Mexico comes from the Alptraum Communist Collective. Though it indicates some illusions about the level of class consciousness of workers in Europe, we are publishing it as part of our revolutionary duty to inform workers of struggles throughout the world, information denied us by the bourgeoisie. The report clearly shows that workers are globally faced by the same attack from a crisis ridden system.

* * *

The substantial drop in the living standards of the Mexican working class over the last 3 years reached its most extreme at the beginning of 1987. The wages of the electrical workers illustrates what has happened in the public sector. After receiving 11.5 times the legal minimum in 1982, they received only 4 times the legal minimum in 1986.

The anxiety of workers in the public sector has been obvious for a year. Most of the trade unions carried out 'collective' bargaining and agreed on professional salaries between January and April. The increasing pressure from the workers for higher wages forewarned the public sector unions that there would be struggles that they would possibly only be on the margin of. In February the state told the workers via the unions that "there were no funds" to cover the demand for an 'emergency' wage rise of 23%. (In Mexico the annual rate of inflation is over 10%). In spite of the harsh attacks which the working class had received at DINA, RENAULT and FUNDIDORA DE MONTEREY (FUMOSA) in 1986 and immediately after the end of the student strike in Mexico City (A typical middle-class conflict which the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie dealt with accordingly to show the working class the 'benefits' of bourgeois democracy in the midst of its worst ever economic crisis.) 36,000 electricians came out on strike on 28th Feb in the central part of the country which extended through the Federal District and the 4 surrounding provinces. The strike significantly affected the central nerve of the productive apparatus because this is the most important area of the country as well as having the highest concentration of workers. Also, electricity is the additional raw material which sets into motion all the industry of the region and the greater part of the country. The strike lasted only 5 days and the workers went back to work without obtaining anything. But in that short time there clearly appeared a number of tendencies which already exist, principally in the present-day struggles of the European working class. In fact some of these were beginning to appear at FUMOSA. In the electricians' strike we find the working class replying with the same tendency towards extension to other sections of the working class as happened recently in Belgium, France and Spain. Similarly, the length of this strike can be contrasted with the one at FUMOSA which lasted 2 months.

The characteristics of the strike are as follows:

(1) Compared to last year at DINA, RENAULT and FUMOSA where the strikes lasted longer, the electricians' strike acquired a political character immediately. Two hours before the strike began the state, by presidential decree, took over the electricity plants to "safeguard the national interest. Some electricity generating stations were occupied and guarded by the "forces of public order". The army was put on standby ready to intervene.

Faced with the clear political character which the strike had now acquired, the union, with the help of the left-wing of capital, drummed into the heads of the workers that "the movement is a national affair in defence of every legal, constitutional right and in defence of national sovereignty" by which it concealed the fact that the economic struggle becomes a political struggle once it confronts the bourgeois State and that bourgeois democracy is nothing other than the political dictatorship of capital over the proletariat and the dispossessed.

(2) The union showed great flexibility in adapting itself to the conditions which the workers' struggle imposed in order to entrap it into its net and then swallow it up. The unions who are tightly tethered to the state apparatus are more likely to lose their credibility with the workers as a result of their activity at FUMOSA (14,000 sacked directly, 40,000 indirectly). Because of this, it is necessary that the left of capital and the Leftists come into the action in order to maintain order and channel the movement towards "social peace". In this strike, and in contrast to what happened at FUMOSA where the workers were represented by a union clearly identified as a part of the state structure, the Mexican Electricians Union (SME) is "democratic" as well as being a bridge between official unionism and rank and file unionism ("of the class") as promoted by the left of capital and the Leftists. Equally, from the first minute of the strike, the union drummed into the workers' minds that "the union organization was at risk" and thus it was necessary to comply with the decisions of the union central committee. This permitted the SME to move from the light to the left and vice-versa, radicalizing its language at the same time as it put forward slogans which appealed to nothing but pure nationalist sentiment. The workers let themselves be led, literally, by what the SME decided - most of them left their workplaces and gathered round the union offices in order to "avoid violence"; the propaganda they gave out was given to them by the union; they let the union seek solidarity from other unions, etc etc.

The S.M.E., like the motor workers and the mining unions at DINA, RENAULT and FUMOSA, kept the workers trapped in the worst type of sectionalism, isolating them from the rest of the workers and keeping the conflict at local level (the S.M.E. controlled only the workers in the central zone.) Moreover, the S.M.E., as one of the principal instigators when the whole gamut of "democratic" unions and rank and file unionists met to formulate caricatures of acts of solidarity busied itself filling the pages of the bourgeois press with real "paper" solidarity whilst the rest of the unions kept "their" workers quiet. The left of capital through its political parties, groups and trade-unionists took charge, in its turn, of bombarding the electricians with the idea that it was necessary to defend that "bastion of democracy" which was the S.M.E and, above all, it was necessary to channel the struggle into demands defending "national sovereignty" and opposing "payment of foreign debt" etc, etc.

(3) The State waged all its campaign of intimidation through the mass media, the purpose of which was to take away any sympathy for the strike from other sectors of the working class and from the impoverished petty bourgeoisie as well as frightening the strikers themselves. The bourgeois press (from the right to the left) and television repeated incessantly that the suspension of the electricity service affected mainly working class areas, that it was increasing night-time crime and that giving in to the wage demand would lead to a rise in the cost of electricity to the public. It was also suggested that the Electricity Company might have to be closed down with massive redundancies. Even the SME said in a public leaflet "the economic council (has told us) that if you join the strike we will close down aircraft factories, take over the telephone network and liquidate the Electricity Company". All this helped to keep the rest of the workers locked in their workplaces. The State insisted that the strike was illegal and at some substations paramilitary units harassed strike-pickets and even seized a group of them. And where it was necessary, due to their strategic position, to keep generating plants working it protected scabs (non-unionized workers from the same company or brought from other state enterprises) with police units.

(4) The only march which the electricians managed to organize (of about 800,000) was composed mainly of contingents of

electricians from the 4 provinces of the central zone. They were joined by other public sector workers (from the city's Metro, Foreign Trade bank, Telecommunications, buses and universities) and from manufacturing industry (clothing) as well as small nuclei of workers who were themselves on strike in medium-size factories (the Moctezuma brewery, the Ecatepec steel-works). Groups of people from the poor areas as well as groups of students also joined the march. Faced with the clear possibility of a massive extension of the strike to other sectors, the labour tribunal declared, two days after the march, that the strike was calling on workers to return to work immediately or face the threat of massive redundancies. The union forced the workers to return, and then said to them "we are respectful of the law". When the union also said this to the assembly of workers who remained in the union offices, the strikers there were very unhappy. Shouts of "traitors" were thrown at the union leaders, but all their anger soon dissolved into frustration and then into resignation. Only a minority of workers were capable of questioning the union itself but without managing to draw up a balance sheet of what had happened they attributed the defeat to the "mistaken tactics" of the central committee of the union.

(5) Whilst the state smashed the electricians, the rest of the unions sabotaged any attempt at mobilisation by other sectors. On three separate occasions they stopped strikes which broke out in key sectors such as telephones, the aircraft industry and the city's trams. They also demobilized workers from the universities, the cinema industry and primary schools. Sector after sector, the unions manipulated and imposed themselves onto the workers in order that selves onto the workers to force them to accept the state's determination not to grant a general emergency wage increase. After the electricians' strike broke out it was clear that the telephone workers would go out on strike. Right up to the last minute the union tried to prevent this strike from breaking out, postponing it many times, but in the union meetings the determination of the workers to come out on strike was very strong. The state applied the same tactic it had employed with the electricians. Two hours beforehand it took over the workplaces and the union made the workers return to work immediately. Nor, on this occasion, were the telephone workers capable of opposing the union.

Finally it can be seen clearly that the union, in its different varieties, is a real obstacle to the wage struggles of the working class, since far from expressing the interests of the wage struggle of the workers, it incarnates the interests of the bourgeois nation and its State. The bourgeois State imposes its wages' policy with union help, thus breaking working class resistance and containing any tendencies towards extension, generalization and simultaneity. The movement of resistance to the wage policies of capital which the electricians managed to carry out, even with all its limitations, its sectionalism, its faith in the unions, its lack of confidence in its own forces, its isolation, and the great weight of bourgeois ideology which lay over them - this movement was important because it showed to the workers that the struggle for economic demands transforms itself inevitably into a political movement given that the bourgeois state must inexorably confront them. It also showed them that a tendency towards the mass strike exists, where the possibilities of where extending the movement to other sectors becomes each time clearer.

For the abolition of wage labour!

COMMUNISM
MEXICO D.F. APRIL 1987

THE COMMUNIST

PRESENCE IN INDIA

It is testimony to the growth of the internationalist communist movement in India that, only just over two years since we first featured the area in WORKERS VOICE 18 when we erroneously hoped for a communist development from the publishers of a journal then entitled Revolutionary Proletariat (for our subsequent views on this group, Revolutionary Proletarian Platform, see WORKERS VOICE 24 and COMMUNIST REVIEW 3 and 4) the Bureau delegation were able to visit the publishers of three unambiguously communist papers there at the beginning of this year.

LAL PATAKA: ORGAN OF THE BUREAU

First amongst these was Lal Pataka (Red Flag) which had split from the RP group in the process of its confrontations with the IBRP. Our primary purpose in visiting India was to hold face-to-face discussions with Lal Pataka in Calcutta since this had proclaimed its adherence to the positions of the IBRP some months previously. We are happy to be able to announce that in many discussions of a wide-range of issues there was a maximum homogeneity of views. Lal Pataka's formulations of many problems were identical with the Bureau's, even in areas which have not been covered recently in the English language publications of the Bureau (e.g. methods of communist work). On the nature and structure of an international organisation, on the relationship between communists and groups which have only partially broken with bourgeois leftist ideologies and on marxist method we found Lal Pataka's formulations to be entirely in agreement with ours. This confirmed to us that Lal Pataka's adherence to the positions of the Bureau had been in no way premature.

We also discussed extensively the conditions for communist work in India. The usual picture presented in the bourgeois press in the West is that India is still a semi-feudal backwater riven by communalism, casteism and dominated by religious differences. Whilst the bourgeois press everywhere ignores class struggle (in order to prevent the infection spreading and becoming simultaneous) it is particularly grotesque in the case of India. European papers are full of tales of bride burning and religious riots and the working class' massive struggles of recent years are totally ignored. A typical example of this was the month-long strike of 600,000 government workers in Uttar Pradesh which took place during our visit and which received not a single line in the European press (its attention being riveted on Gurkha nationalism in West Bengal). In fact the signs of class struggle were everywhere whether it was strike meetings in the streets of Calcutta, wall slogans in industrial zones or political posters in Delhi. Add to this the recent character of Indian industrialisation which has produced concentrations of heavy industry reminiscent of the situation in Europe at the beginning of this century then the possibilities for intervention seem enormous. With workers not even earning the monthly minimum wage of 450 rupees (25 pounds) a month (300 rupees in Bengal) and unions openly acting for the management enforcing obedience on the workforce largely through a reign of terror operated by union "goondas" (hired thugs) we found ample justification for our view expressed in the Draft Theses on the Periphery (see COMMUNIST REVIEW 3) that the potential for the circulation of the revolutionary communist programme amongst the proletarian masses here is greater than at present in the heartlands of capital. Further the process of industrialisation was itself breaking down the barriers of caste and religion which the ruling class tries to manipulate to in order to divide the workers. Of course the industrial working class of India represents a tiny fraction of the population. 70% of India's 800 millions live in the countryside working a wide number of different landowning systems. However the studies of Lal Pataka have demonstrated that, at least as far as West Bengal is concerned, 80% of the population of the villages own no significant amount of land and exist mainly by hiring themselves out as agricultural labourers. In short, even in the villages the dominant relationship is that of capital over wage labour. Whatever feudal forms that remain they are simply that, forms which only mask the real relationship which is at the heart of the Indian system of agriculture. In general we found much to confirm the Draft Theses. The real difficulty facing Lal Pataka and indeed all the communists in India is to attract a nucleus of capable cadres to form the basis of an organisation which has a real capacity for intervention and a strategy which enables it to work inside the working class without being physically destroyed by the unions.

On the basis of these discussions it was forthwith agreed that LAL PATAKA was to be recognised as the Bengali language publication of the Bureau and that Lal Pataka would act as a committee of the Bureau in India charged with the primary task of participating in any initiative which would help create the basis for a communist organisation throughout the Indian area.



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KAMUNIST KRANTI: LUXEMBURG IN ECONOMICS, LENIN IN POLITICS

In July 1986 a new publication made its appearance in India. KAMUNIST KRANTI (Communist Revolution) announced that it was "an attempt to participate in the constitution of a world communist" by presenting its draft theses and taking up polemics with the European internationalist communists (including the IBRP). This provided an excellent background for some very intensive political discussions which ranged from the internal functioning of a communist organisation to the decline of the Communist International and a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the Italian Left and culminated in agreement on many of the present day problems facing the international communist movement including the strategy of revolutionary groups in the workplaces. Our major area of difference centred around the question of economic analysis since Kamunist Kranti accepts, almost in its totality, the theory of Rosa Luxemburg which states that it is only the realisation of the total new surplus value by non-capitalist areas which allows capitalism to accumulate. The debate was a long one and it is not possible to do justice to it in this brief report. KK seemed to find strength in Luxemburg from the fact that she did not lay particular emphasis on the private property relations of capital and thus unlike Marx did not give grist to the mill of the state capitalists who equate socialisation of the means of production with nationalisation of capital. We argued that whilst it was true that Marx did lay particular stress on the private ownership of the means of production (since it was the only capitalist form in his era) his theory also laid the basis for an alternative definition of capitalism which located its fundamental character in the exploitation of wage labour. The fact that Luxemburg had nothing to say on this question was for us a source of weakness rather than strength in her analysis. It was finally agreed that despite the difference in economic theory KK had arrived at many of the same positions as the IBRP by a different route (e.g. on national liberation, the present period as one of the decadence of capital, on trade unions, on the tasks of communists in the periphery etc) but we would continue to develop the exchange on economics in a manner which would help to develop a communist analysis of imperialism today.

More positive was the discussion on political methodology where KK had clearly modified its position on political method. Although they did not like the term Leninist (since this had been hijacked by the counter-revolution) they took Lenin's methodological framework when approaching political questions. For example on the national question they agreed with Lenin against Luxemburg that the problem is not whether national liberation is possible or not today but whether national struggles help the proletariat. Clearly today they do not and that is why we oppose them not because national liberation (in the sense of formal political independence) is no longer possible. KK had also accepted our position on class consciousness (having studied RP21 since the publication of KK in the summer) and clearly rejected all spontaneist ideas. Altogether we were impressed with the vast amount of theoretical study which KK had gone through in a relatively short time, couple with a perspective of returning the lessons learnt to the working class. Whilst we could only applaud and solidarise with KK's determination to maintain and extend its links with their local working class* we were somewhat surprised to learn that they neither saw themselves as being able to carry out the task of further elaboration of their theoretical work nor that this was a priority. Thus, although our warning against the danger of "running before learning to walk" (i.e. trying to carry out the organisational tasks of a fully-fledged organisation inside the class struggle before the theoretical groundwork and establishment of a political nucleus was complete) was noted, the problem remained of how to deploy the existing weak forces given the pressing need to act within the daily struggle of the working class.

COMMUNIST INTERNATIONALIST

The need for the existing revolutionary elements in India to work seriously towards the development of such an all-India nucleus was apparent through all the discussions. Despite their close sympathy with a different political tendency (the International Communist Current - ICC) the comrades of Communist Internationalist were no less in agreement on this point. Given their relationship with the ICC, dating back to 1979 we assumed that their integration into that organisation was imminent so saw our task as simply that of setting the record straight on some of the polemical distortions of our positions by the ICC. After initial presentations on the relative histories of our two organisations we held a second discussion in which we dealt with factory groups, the IBRP'S draft theses on the tasks of communists in the periphery, the international situation of the class struggle and the perspectives we held for the regroupment of revolutionaries. Space again forbids an exhaustive account of these discussions but the salient points to emerge were an agreement by CI to submit a written critique of the draft theses on the periphery. Here they had criticised our view that it was easier to get a following amongst the masses in the periphery since a) mass parties were not possible in this epoch and b) the proletariat is dominated by religious and caste distinctions in India. We replied that they had not read the theses carefully since they clearly state that we don't envisage mass parties - we use the term in a relative sense compared to the situation in Europe. Furthermore our stay in India had confirmed the view that it was relatively easier to gain a wider hearing for communist ideas in the periphery due to the lack of sophistication of the bourgeoisie in the measures it takes for containing the class.

Discussion then moved on to the question of perspectives for the class struggle. Here CI told us that they had recently written to the ICC criticising their over-optimistic view which sees every manifestation of the class struggle today as the immediate prefiguration of proletarian revolution. On the other hand they thought the IBRP perspective too pessimistic. We felt however that the comrades were using a more materialistic method than the increasingly fantasised versions of the ICC which leave out the central element of class consciousness and the present incredible weakness of the political expression of the working class.

Closer agreement was reached on the present situation of the Indian bourgeoisie. Here one comrade read us part of an article on the Indian situation which showed that the Indian bourgeoisie is in something of a cleft stick since, in common with other ruling classes throughout the planet, it would like to go over to greater economic freedom and less state restrictions (now that these have given India an industrial base). However this means rapprochement with the Western bloc. This is difficult for the Indian ruling class to achieve since its military and diplomatic position in South Asia is dependent on its relations with the USSR, its ally against the US backed Pakistani and Chinese regimes. Thus the adoption of right-wing policies which have been prevalent throughout the globe in the last decade have been difficult to introduce in India.

At the end of our discussions the CI comrades told us that they still had many questions to resolve and that were keen to take part in discussions with the other groups. This attitude mirrored that of Lal Pataka and the frank and open discussions we held with all the communists in India gave us a lot of optimism for the future possibilities for communist organisation in India. Particularly impressive was the way that they linked their awareness to the need for discussion with the most pressing problems of how to develop a viable nucleus in India which would be both programmatically prepared and organisationally capable of playing a role in developing an important section of an international organisation which was not merely a clone of a parent body.

FOR CONTACT AND SUPPORT WRITE TO THE FOLLOWING ADDRESSES;

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WORKERS VOICE

GRAMSCI: "GURU OF THE LEFT"

Once confined to Italy, the interpretation and reinterpretation of the work of Antonio Gramsci (the intellectual and political leader who died 50 years ago a "martyr of fascism") has become an almost global preoccupation. In the West Gramsci has become a political and ideological symbol and the object of a veritable cult. In Russia the policy of "glasnost" is now being extended into the realm of Stalinist ideology with the appearance of an article on Gramsci in the CPSU's journal *Kommunist* and there are plans to publish the *Prison Notebooks* (once considered to contain suspect matter) in full for the first time later this year. In Britain, since the 1960s, Gramsci has received an enthusiastic reception from the academic press and has been embraced warmly not only by the Eurocommunist wing of the Communist Party and the New Left of the Labour Party but also by 'far-left' groups such as the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

1987 has witnessed a plethora of contributions to the ever increasing volume of literature on the Sardinian thinker, now so massive that it defies the energies of even the most ardent scholars! That Gramsci has been widely hailed as a major Marxist theorist illuminating the realities of advanced capitalism and the work of the genuine Italian Left thrust aside, is something the CWO has recently sought to challenge with the publication in *Communist Review* #5 of the first of a two-part assault on the legitimacy of the Gramsci mythology. In this text, without becoming embroiled in interpretative controversies, we want to present some of the themes of our analysis and more specifically examine the political intent behind current Gramsci hagiography.

GRAMSCI'S STATUS AS A MARXIST

Gramsci came to notoriety during the Red Years of 1919-1920 as the main inspiration behind the movement for factory councils in Turin and editor of its newspaper *L'Ordine Nuovo*. Gramsci saw the council as the place where the working class would elaborate its education and develop its 'own' culture under bourgeois rule. In this perspective the capitalist state was supposed to coexist with an advanced form of 'workers' control' and the necessity for the class to leave the factories and attack the state, the heart of the capitalist system, eliminated. From 1921 to 1926, after the formation of the Communist Party of Italy, of which he played only a minimal role, Gramsci rose to the leadership of the party, taking its policies away from the revolutionary clarity of those of its founders, Amadeo Bordiga and the Italian Left, and conducting negotiations with a degenerating Comintern, as the protagonist of the party's

'bolshevisation' (i.e. the assumption of authoritarian control and the suppression of party dissidents). While a prisoner from 1926 until his death in 1937, Gramsci produced his major theoretical piece - the *Prison Notebooks*. This fragmentary and intrinsically ambiguous work, together with his earlier councilist aberrations, has provided ideal material for the revisers of Marxism.

Moreover, contrary to the claims of the leftists, whatever his revolutionary intent, there is no doubt that from his days in the Italian Socialist Party during the First World War, Gramsci was far more influenced by the idealist philosopher Benedetto Croce than by Marxism. Gramsci was also influenced by Giovanni Gentile, later a philosopher of fascism; by Georges Sorel, the French theorist of syndicalism and Gaetano Salvemini, later to gain prominence as a liberal opponent of fascism. In a famous article on the October Revolution Gramsci describes the actions of the Bolsheviks as "The Revolution Against Capital", implying that revolutionary will had outweighed the force of material circumstances, when the revolution began in a backward country like Russia. There is no record of Gramsci ever breaking with these anti-Marxist views or that he ever threw off the influence of the neo-idealist milieu. This is clear not only in the *L'Ordine Nuovo* period but also in the *Prison Notebooks* and is evident in Gramsci's views about the working class and its relationship to the party and about the state and the so-called concept of hegemony. Every one of Gramsci's concessions to idealism provided the raw material not only for his own opportunism and interclassist theories - Gramsci was an author of the most elastic interpretation of the erroneous tactic of the united front, abandoning the proletariat as the only revolutionary class and opening the way for popular fronts; but also for the counter-revolutionary policies of contemporary Gramscians.

GRAMSCI'S HEIRS

Today 'Gramscism' has become, in the course of an ideological controversy detached from the realities of the class struggle, an amorphous, polyvalent reactionary doctrine over which it is easy to stage a 'battle of quotations', and indeed there are many leftist groups who see Gramsci as part of 'their tradition'. In the 1970s Gramsci's work was pivotal in the movement of the Stalinist parties toward 'Eurocommunism', as the major Western CPs took their distance from the Russian bourgeoisie so as to move closer to their own capitalist class. In Britain the Communist Party adopted a new explicitly social democratic programme and under the

spur of the Labour Party's defeats in 1979 and 1983 its journal *Marxism Today* set about 'adapting' Gramscism to British conditions. The logical corollary of this is its call for an anti-Thatcher pact stretching from the CP to the Alliance, and Eric Hobsbawm's advocacy of tactical voting to keep out the Tories (see the May edition of *MT*).

Among the Labour Party's left the activities of local councils (especially the GLC's promotion of cultural and voluntary groups) and partial movements (e.g. feminism, environmentalism and anti-racism) are seen as counter-hegemonic struggles to undermine the resurgence of right-wing ideas during the Thatcher years; while the Clause 4 faction has published a pamphlet on Gramsci (P. Bell's *New Party New Politics*) arguing for the introduction of a Gramscian dimension to Labour's strategy of emasculating the working class and dissipating its struggles. (Even Neil Kinnock has discovered Gramsci, citing him approvingly as a 'creator of socialist thought' in his 1985 Fabian Society lecture!)

The position of the SWP is particularly ironic. They call for an anti-Thatcher vote - precisely the same as Hobsbawm - and yet claim that the CP are deforming Gramsci's ideas to justify Eurocommunism! Further, the SWP's efforts to claim Gramsci as their property and demolish the true Marxism of the Italian Left (see the pamphlet *Gramsci Versus Reformism*) are based on bouts of selective amnesia (Gramsci was a Stalinist from 1925-26 and wholly critical of Trotsky in the *Prison Notebooks*) and straightforward distortions (e.g. see Callinicos' comments on Bordiga in *Socialist Worker* 11/4/87, "Gramsci: Revolutionary Marxist").

THE REVOLUTIONARY ALTERNATIVE

Unlike the leftists, for whom "we are all Gramscians now", the CWO takes no part in the current fad for Gramsci. It is no accident that the leftists seize upon Gramsci in their desperate attempts to defend the counter-revolution against the struggles of the working class. There was only one Italian tradition that continued the struggles of the Bolsheviks. It is not to be found in the work of Gramsci but in the fight of the Italian Left against the degeneration of the Comintern and which managed to create the nucleus of a truly revolutionary movement after the Second World War. It is a tradition today best represented in the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party. We intend to expose the Gramsci mythology for what it is - another attempt to disarm and confuse the working class - as part of the struggle to construct the World Communist Party.

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THATCHERISM Continued from Page 2

26. Thatcherism's ability to succeed in its aims, depends on the evolution of world capital. However, though it may provide a breathing-space (indeed, has done), its medium-term prospects are in doubt. Oil and illusions have underlain the Thatcher years, and as the one runs out, so will the other. It is unlikely that oil will provide the cushion for British capitalism in the 90's that it did in the 80's. It is also doubtful if world trade in services will expand as fast as Thatcher hopes; or indeed that Britain will maintain, let alone increase its share, given the emergence of countries like Japan into this lucrative area of parasitism. And Britain's ability to maintain its role as an exporter of agricultural produce, given the fiscal crisis in the EEC is in long-term doubt. When the harvest of Thatcher's economic policies is gathered in, there will be few reserves for British capitalism to deal with its "lean years".

27. Viz-a viz the class also, short term gains only point to long term problems. Policies of asset stripping of state property and tax cuts, can only go so far, and indeed tax cuts will need to be reversed in the next government (eg., doubling of VAT, which the Tories haven't denied). It is unlikely too, whether the hot house petty-

bourgeoisie can be kept alive indefinitely, as the British state falls under increasing financial strain in the years ahead. Eventually, the ruling class will have to opt for all out and frontal attacks on the entire class which will homogenise its consciousness, and its response, overcoming the years of fragmentation and division.

ARTICLES OF RELATED INTEREST.

"People's Capitalism - Sharing out the Sinking Ship," in *WORKERS VOICE*, 33.

"Living Standards and the Crisis" in *WORKERS VOICE*, 31.

"Privatisation: the Communist Position", in *WORKERS VOICE*, 18

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