

# WORKERS VOICE

COMMUNIST  
WORKERS  
ORGANISATION

## CONTENTS

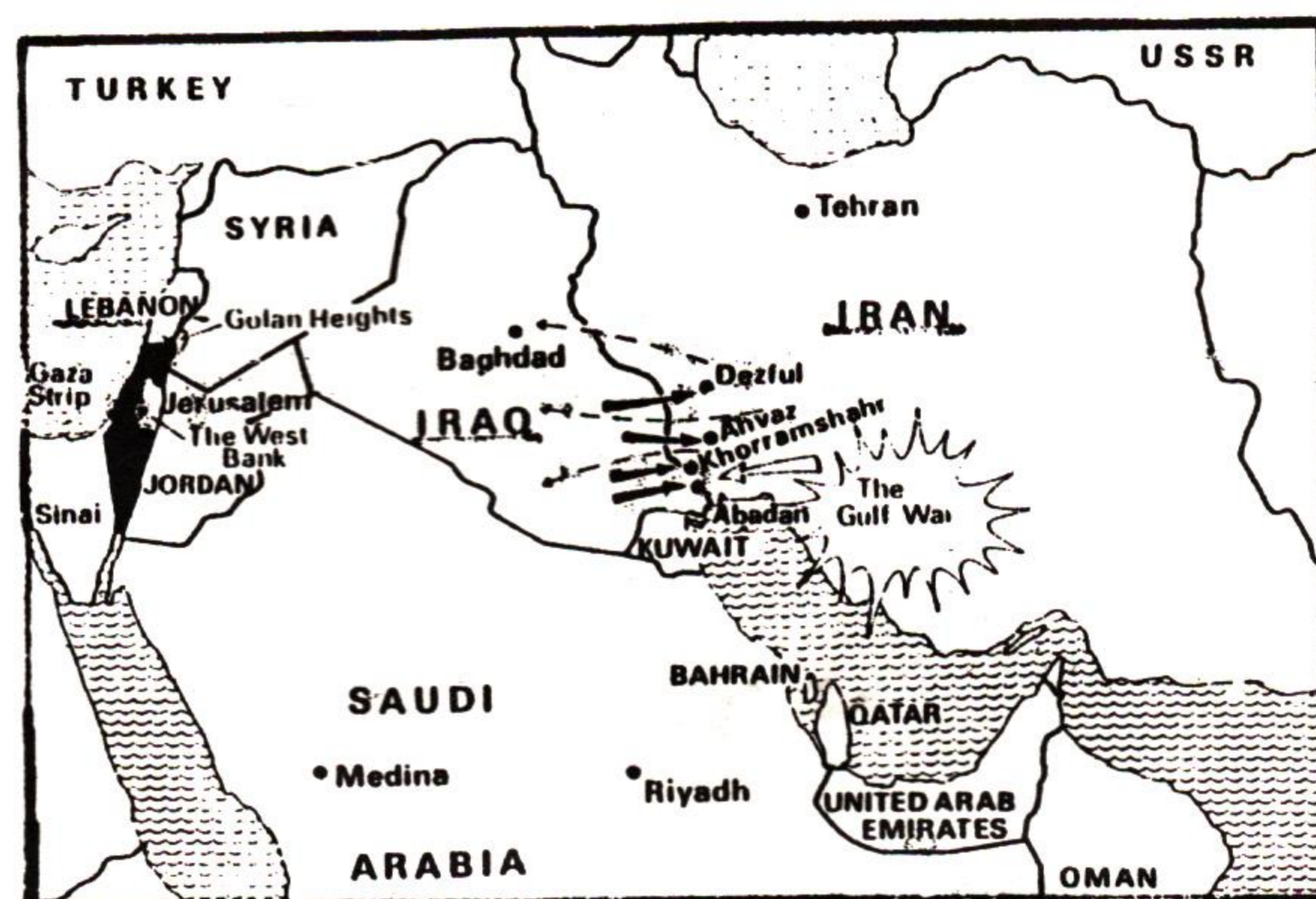
Thatcherism .....	2	Debt Crisis .....	6
Missile Accord .....	2	Working Class in Ulster ..	7
Korea .....	3	South Africa .....	8
October Revolution ...	4		

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1987

37 30p

THE GULF WAR WIDENS:

## U.S. DRAGOOONS ITS BLOC TOWARDS WAR



Amidst all the talk of progress towards disarmament, and the easing of international tension, the present situation in the Gulf shows the fragile basis on which any "peace" under capitalism is based. With the ever-increasing pressure of economic crisis, struggle for control of vital raw materials and strategic areas becomes more intense, and fraught with dangers.

The provocative military build-up in the Gulf by the USA, has once again demonstrated the willingness of the American bourgeoisie to use overt military force to protect its interests, and the shrugging off of the "restraint" which has supposedly characterised American policy since Vietnam. (This restraint was little more than a preference for covert, rather than overt, operations.) The "Hollywood as Foreign Policy" which marked the Granada invasion and raid on Libya has assumed a grimmer dimension with the largest US military build up since the Vietnam war.

What is also significant about this crisis, is the way that American imperialism has been able to drag on its allies into support for its actions. The sending of British, French and Italian contingents to the Gulf has given a unanimity to western imperialism's voice, which was lacking in the attack on Libya for example. This shows that whatever differences over trade and minor foreign policy issues divide the western bloc, when it comes to an issue of major importance, where the position of the whole bloc is at stake, then the USA as the major imperialism will be able to rally the forces of its bloc behind it. In this sense, as well as being a training ground for a future more general conflict (eg. in the lessons learned about minesweeping and other logistical operations), the present crisis is a political dress rehearsal for mobilisation of bloc cohesion and popular fervour, for the "real thing".

### THE WAR GOES ON.

The build up in the Gulf has temporarily overshadowed the war taking place between Iran and Iraq, which has lasted for over seven years, and has cost, at a conservative estimate, over a million lives. The rival super-powers, the USA and USSR, were quite content to see the carnage continue, as long as the war seemed deadlocked. This allowed them to reap huge profits, by selling arms to both sides, and also by helping maintain international oil prices, from which both profit. In addition, both states behaved, in an extremely maverick

fashion, and imperialism hoped that the rigours and needs of war would discipline them into better behaviour.

But the danger of an Iranian victory has made a choice inevitable, and US imperialism has decided that a defeat for Iraq would be a severe blow to its interests in the region, after the failure to seek a rapprochement with the "moderate Mullahs" (ie., the ones who have run out of ammo.) in Iran. Now under the hypocritical guise of protecting "freedom of the seas" (adherence to which doctrine didn't stop the CIA mining Nicaragua's harbours), the USA has stepped in to prevent the defeat of Iraq, by protecting shipping (mainly oil flows) from countries which support Iraq financially, such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and whose support is essential to prevent Iraq's defeat. The ruthless politics of imperialist self interest are revealed when it is recalled that Iraq has been the main culprit in attacking Gulf shipping, and that the whole hysterical build up in the Gulf started after an IRAQI attack on a US vessel and the deaths of many Americans.

US imperialism clearly hopes to provoke the Ayatollahs into a response that would give the excuse to impose a humiliating blow on Khomeini's regime, like the US attack on Libya last year, but on a larger scale. This would both serve as a warning to anyone else considering threatening American interests in the region, and also serve as a morale booster for the Reagan administration staggering under the Iranagate scandals, and further stimulate the bellicose passions which the US bourgeoisie are trying to dominate the American population with. A further cynical motive of this orchestrated crisis, is the attempt to raise oil prices, which the international monopolies thought had fallen too low; since the Gulf crisis, oil exploration has started gain in the North Sea, for example.

### THE LEADERS TALK OF PEACE..

While behaving like the dogs of war, the US government are posing as angels of peace, with the presentation of cynical United Nations resolutions calling for a ceasefire in the Gulf war, and raising the possibility of an arms embargo. This smoke-screen would be farcical, were it not so tragic in that such hypocrisy is supported by those such as Britain, China, the USSR and France, whose arms deals have kept the war going for so long.

The USSR on the other hand, is trying to slowly rebuild its presence in the Middle East, after its virtual exclusion from the area in the early 70's. It has therefore been playing a low profile role, hoping that the US will find itself in "deep waters", and that it can profit from any shipwreck. The establishment of diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia can be seen as a major boost for the Russians, and at the same time they are trying to rebuild their image as Iran's traditional protector against western imperialism. Relations between Moscow and the Mullahs are now at their best since the Shah's overthrow, and huge economic deals have been signed, including the re-opening of a gas pipeline, and plans for an oil pipeline, from Iran to the Soviet Union. It is rumoured that the Russians have also been increasing arms shipments to Tehran.

To the war itself, there is at present little sign of an end. Though Iraq would clearly settle for a status quo ante bellum, there is little sign that Iran would. While Saddam in Baghdad feels that to continue the war may de-stabilise his regime, the Mullahs feel that it is the war itself which provides the social cohesion for their bonapartist rule, and only victory is thus acceptable. Since its outbreak, the conflict between the two gangs of butchers in Baghdad and Tehran had been only partly explained by their rival desire for the oil rich disputed territory at the head of the Gulf. For both regimes it was in addition a way of deflecting growing class struggle by the proletarian and semi-proletarian masses into the cul de sac of a fratricidal war. From the start we have taken the internationalist position of opposing the war and calling for fraternisation at the front, and class resistance in the rear. To the workers in the west we add the same message; you have nothing to gain from supporting your "own" governments. The military build up in the Gulf is not to protect the lives of seamen or jobs in the west, but the interests of imperialism.

IMPERIALISM OUT OF THE GULF!

FOR CLASS ACTION AGAINST THE TASK FORCES!

DOWN WITH UN HYPOCRISY!

END THE IRAN IRAQ WAR BY CLASS SOLIDARITY!

## CORRESPONDENCE: REPLY TO THESES ON THATCHERISM

We are publishing the following theses from a member of the CWO as part of the debate on the theses on Thatcherism published in WV 35. In the future we will publish the comments of other organisations.

### THATCHERISM AND STATE CAPITALISM

The theses on Thatcherism (WV 35) point to certain important changes in the bourgeoisie's strategy towards the crisis and the working class which have taken place in the 80's. The reasons for these changes are, however, not clear as these are not derived from capitalism's crisis and certain of the theses are misleading. In particular the theses ridicule the idea of a reversal of Thatcherism, state that the British bourgeoisie has abandoned the defence of the national capital and suggest that Britain is being thirdworldised. The CWO's analysis of state capitalism is thereby called into question and new perspectives for the development of the crisis are implied. The following counter theses attempt to relate Thatcherism to its economic basis, demonstrate its contradictory nature and the necessity for its reversal.

1. The fundamental cause of the crisis is the falling rate of profit. This chokes off industrial investment and restricts capital accumulation. The policies of the bourgeoisie need to be related to this basic problem.

2. The previous policies of the bourgeoisie were designed to increase the rate of profit by increasing the speed of turnover of capital by increasing demand via public spending, grants printing money etc. (Keynesism). These measures failed to solve the crisis in the 70's and have been jettisoned. e.g. Labour's state capitalist policies failed to protect British capital.

3. The present policies being implemented by the leading industrial nations centre on increasing the rate of exploitation. This is partly achieved by the installation of new constant capital which increases productivity and sheds labour but more importantly through speed ups and new working methods. Both increase the rate of surplus value by increasing the relative surplus value. This is combined with an attempt to reduce state spending and control inflation.

4. Thatcher's policies of privatisation and self employment for the working class are part of this drive for rationalisation and increased exploitation -- part of a violent effort to restore profitability.

5. Attempts to decrease state spending are frustrated by the necessity to support the massive numbers of unemployed. Despite massive cuts in services the total state spending has not fallen under Thatcher. In order to avoid borrowing or printing money, the deficit is being funded by the proceeds of the sale of state assets.

6. Thatcherism aims to allow the market to regulate accumulation, i.e. accumulation is regulated by the rate of profit. Since this is low in Britain capital is being directed towards parasitic and speculative fields, e.g. banking, financial services property etc. where the return is higher, or simply leaves the country.

7. The formation of an average rate of profit has been restricted in the era of capitalist decline by the existence of monopolies and by the vast masses of capital required for accumulation in the industries of high organic content. (e.g. Steel mining heavy engineering etc)

8. The industries most heavily capitalised have the lowest rate of profit and fail to generate the capital required for accumulation. Their survival is ensured not by the mechanism of the market, as in capitalism's ascendancy but through the state channelling

surplus value extracted from the profitable sectors of the economy to them. The survival of these industries is undertaken by the state for the benefit of the national capital as a whole.

9. Thatcherism does not recognise this and is therefore a short term policy which must collapse under the weight of its own contradictions.

-the more the bourgeoisie sells off those assets which are profitable the less surplus value it has to direct to those which are not and the less they will accumulate and the less profitable they will become.

-although the rationalisation and increases in productivity will raise the rate of profit in those industries which serve the state is left supporting ever greater numbers of unemployed. This makes it unable to cut state spending. Deficit financing by selling off assets cannot be continued indefinitely since these assets will be exhausted.

-reliance on the market for capital accumulation in Britain will lead to the bankruptcy of the highly capitalised sectors of industry. Steel, mining, rail transport and a lot of heavy engineering will collapse and be replaced with commodities from capitals with a higher rate of profit.

10. The theses of WV 35 appear to envisage a future for Thatcherism when they scoff at the idea of a U turn, and talk of the third worldisation of Britain. If this is the case it means that either:-

the CWO's analysis of state capitalism is wrong and the market can regulate accumulation,

or that Britain really is to be third worldised with collapse of its industrial base and a fall in the working class living standards to the levels of Korea or Brazil before fresh capital is invested. This assumes a totally supine working class. Hitherto the CWO has maintained that the social convulsions this would entail would lead either to revolution or war before this could occur.

11. Although Thatcherism has failed to protect British capitalism this is not its intention. The Labour governments similarly failed to protect British capitalism and again this was not their intention. It is incorrect to say that the British bourgeoisie has abandoned any attempt to maintain its position as a national capital.

12. Although Thatcherism may be maintained for a few more years thereafter these policies will be reversed. Lack of industrial investment today means that a short term recovery is not a possibility. In fact, a collapse in the present returns on speculative capital is more likely.

13. When a Labour government attempts to reverse the effects of the Thatcher years it will have less assets with which to face the crisis and will have to resort to radical and autarchic measures.

### PUBLIC MEETING

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 28th:

The group Wildcat is holding a meeting on WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST. Guest speaker from the CWO.

'Gulliver's', Oldham St.,  
MANCHESTER

## ARMS TALKS: A MIRAGE FOR PEACE

The much-publicised super-power talks about reducing intermediate range nuclear missiles amounts to nothing but a rather obvious fraud. Even on the figures quoted by the governments of the USA and USSR only 4% of warheads will be scrapped. The plutonium from them will be used to keep the other 25,000 long range missiles held by both sides in warheads.

But even if this agreement eliminated all nuclear missiles it would not eliminate the slow but inexorable movement of capitalism towards war. The basis for this process can't be traced to the immorality of the Russian and American governments (the Actonian cry that "all power corrupts...") nor to the supposed violent instinct of the male (the last resort of the feminists). The drive to war is intrinsic to 20th century capitalism. The superpowers don't wish for a 3rd World War but at the end of the day this will be the only option they find open to them. Ultimately capital's solution to the growing contradiction of a world with too much capital and not enough profit to invest for further accumulation is to destroy the 'surplus' capital itself. At present our rulers are still searching for a way out of the crisis. The recent agreement is part of that search. Whilst Gorbachev hopes to direct some of the 25% of the Russian budget being spent on arms into productive activity, Reagan is trying to reduce the U.S. budget deficit.

But unproductive arms spending is not the cause of the crisis. As the crisis gets worse we will see more preparations for open confrontation between the superpowers. The move away from developing nuclear weapons to 'conventional' means of destruction is already a symptom of this. (Imperialism has always had weapons which came to be accepted by all sides as too dangerous for general use - e.g. mustard gas after the 1st World War.) As both blocs become more desperate to head off economic disaster the present showdowns in the Middle East, the Caribbean, Central Africa will be directed, not each other's puppets but at the other super-power. Then the question of arms will be seen for what it is - merely a technical aspect of capitalism's basic war drive.

As history shows, peace marches, nuclear freezes, and so on make no difference to this war drive. The only real answer lies with the working class. It's true that without at least the implicit acquiescence of the working class governments can hardly wage war. But the consciousness to fight capitalist war cannot come from preaching moral imperatives about the need to fight. At peace or at war capitalism is the deadly enemy of the working class. Yet revolutionaries (who after all claim the political leadership of the working class) can't leave it for workers as a whole to gradually realise this as they fight the rearguard battle to defend jobs and wages. Certainly the crisis and the struggle against capital's attacks are necessary preconditions for the development of mass discontent but history has shown that this itself is not enough to generate widespread revolutionary consciousness. Without organised political leadership, without a clearly spelled-out programme, the protests of the international working class may threaten and even topple governments but they will never overthrow the social system which spawned them. The struggle to re-create genuine working class political organisations, to re-establish an international programme of revolution is a crucial part of the struggle to put an end to capitalism's wars by replacing the present world order with a higher, civilised social system. It is a long road but it is the only road for the future of humanity.

## KOREA:

# THE WORKING CLASS FIGHTS FOR ITS OWN INTERESTS NOT FOR DEMOCRACY

KOREA: SEVEN YEARS ON

Seven years ago, in the first issue of the current series of WORKERS VOICE, we reported on the massive battles of Korean industrial workers when their attempt to defend jobs and living standards brought them into confrontation with the full brutality of the power of the state. In 1980 these battles reached insurrectionary proportions (entire cities, such as Kwanju were seized) but the threat to the Korean state was averted when the workers' struggle began to be subsumed under a growing student protest for greater "democracy". In the absence of a political programme of their own, the working class found their struggle becoming more and more identified with that of the democratic wing of Korea's capitalist class. In the end the whole insurrectionary movement was crushed by the army in a bloodbath which left thousands of (unofficially acknowledged) dead.

In 1980 it was easy to find a direct material, 'economic' reason for the strikes and all-out battles with the army and police. The economic "miracle" of Korean capitalism had floundered when exemplary economic growth rates turned into disastrous indicators of contraction (-4% by 1980). As always the capitalist class were making those who produce their profits pay for the crisis: on top of their already notoriously low wages and long working hours without social security benefits Korean workers were facing growing inflation and job losses.

Seven years on, faced with a similar wave of student protest for 'democracy' and industrial strikes it is tempting to point to the ever-worsening economic crisis as the material cause of the workers' "unrest". But this explanation is over-simplistic and is not borne out by the facts.

While it is certainly true that Korea's 15 million urban workforce is amongst the most highly exploited in the world (they work longer hours than anywhere else, have shorter holidays - about 3-4 days a year AND WEEKENDS ARE NOT REST DAYS! - and even skilled workers are often paid no more than \$3 per day) the economy is growing at a rate second only to Japan. (12% in 1986 and, until this year's strikes, the projection for 1987 was between 12-15%.) Today Korean industry is more than ever a significant part of the world economy. Ten industrial conglomerates dominate an economy which produces prime products for the world market like steel, textiles, ships (2nd largest in the world) and even cars. DESPITE the fact that capitalism is experiencing a global crisis the Korean economy is currently booming. This doesn't mean that Korea is immune to the crisis. On the contrary, Korea, like Japan, is being told by the West it must shoulder more of the burden of its effects. But it does mean that the context of this year's workers' struggles is somewhat different from those in 1980.

First of all, the TIMING was significantly different. In 1980 the working class struggle was followed by the diversionary democratic movement of the students. This year it was the working class who waited to see the impact of the student movement before embarking on their own struggle for higher wages. Unlike present struggles in Europe or in the bulk of capitalism's periphery, the Korean working class was fighting from a position of strength. To coin a phrase, they were demanding a bigger share of the cake not simply trying to get back what the bosses and inflation had taken away from them. Thus, while the students were a political challenge to the existing military regime of General Chun Doo Hwan, strikes by almost every sector of the working class amounting to over 3,000 during 8 weeks threatened to undermine the well-being of the economy and therefore the strength of the state as a whole.

It would be a mistake to say that the working class acted politically independently of the democratic wing of the capitalist class but as far as their immediate economic interests were concerned this time the workers didn't

abandon their struggle for the vagaries of "increased democracy". In a way what happened in Korea this summer is a peripheral version of events in France in May '68. Then we say "idealistic" students calling for democratic reforms at a time of relative prosperity. The French working class, no less than their Korean counterpart today, were without a political programme of their own and whilst 'going along with' the students' democratic demands they were able to win material gains.

### PERSPECTIVES

Almost unique amongst the world's workers, our class compatriots in Korea have won significant improvements in their wages and working conditions by their concerted and determined action. (Employers have been obliged to grant between 8% and 25% wage increases.) If capitalism's profitability



Striking workers in South Korea

crisis has speeded up the transfer of Department I and highly capitalised industries to the periphery, the short-term gains this has allowed Korean workers to win must not be used as an excuse to divide the world working class: to pit European worker against Asian worker. The fact remains that workers in the periphery are still super-exploited with living standards which come nowhere near matching those of workers here (even those on the dole). Nevertheless, the Korean events show that there is still a tendency towards evening out of the crisis worldwide.

So what of the future? Korea's place in the world economy, or more precisely in the economy of the Western bloc, which has enabled it to reach its present growth rates, also means that it is not immune from the crisis as a whole. (Even now shipbuilding is beginning to experience losses.) Moreover, the very aspect which makes it useful to Western capital: a low-paid workforce willing to work all hours, ensures that Korean workers will never see the benefits of the equalisation of the crisis and their standard of living will not rise significantly.

At the moment workers in Korea are feeling confident after their successful struggle. At the same time the local ruling class and their U.S. mentors are confident that a new democratic constitution "guaranteeing" greater human rights will produce a period of social calm and political stability in which to tackle the problem of Korea's trade 'imbalance' with the West. As recent developments in the Philippines show, Constitutional democracy instituted by the existing political forces is a thinly disguised camouflage for the maintenance of the interests of U.S. imperialism. (Like the Philippines, South Korea plays host to U.S. troops - 40,000 of them.) There is no such thing as 'democracy' in general and today capitalist democracy is as much an enemy of the working class as any other governmental form the ruling class chooses to adopt. Korean workers will do well to remember that their recent struggle succeeded not because they were fighting for the democratisation of the state but because they put up a united fight which threatened its economic basis. As one Korean capitalist was quoted by the FINANCIAL TIMES (17.9.87):

"We had no idea that the labour demands were strong and all at the same time. We

Had to learn fast, but we managed. Relationships between management and workers should be better from now on."

And part and parcel of the ruling class' democratic strategy is likely to be the encouragement of demands for 'independent' trade unions instead of the present company unions. (For example, the settlement of strikes at Hyundai Shipyard and the Daewoo Motor Company were delayed because the workers' elected union leaders were in jail so there were no negotiations.) Though every communist supports workers electing their own leaders during struggle this is not the same issue as the formation of 'independent unions'. While the first is an essential part of the self-organisation of the working class as it struggles against the capitalist class, unions are permanent bodies whose existence depends on the survival of the capitalist state and whose role today is to persuade workers to accept that state.

In future it will be up to the working class to provide a political alternative to the democratic programmes of the bourgeoisie. This can only be the programme of proletarian revolution which cannot arise spontaneously by a process of osmosis from the economic battles of the class. A wider perspective and aim has to be sought. Despite the belief of Kim Young Sam, Reunification Democratic Party President, that "radical leftism" amongst students will disappear once democracy is established we are sure that reflection on the significance of today's struggles over the years ahead - by both workers and students sympathetic to them (and who we believe even now have access to revolutionary communist literature) - will provide the impetus for the development towards genuinely revolutionary organisations: Organisations which will expose the real meaning of liberal democratic demands and independent unions in the age of monopoly capitalism and counter them with the prospect of revolutionary organs and politics.

BELFAST IN THE 30S

continued from page 7

political leadership is at best wishful thinking." (p.196)

Here Munck and Rolston are of course kicking at an open door since no one but the most crass leftist or Republican would deny that the ideology of Unionism has to some extent been 'internalised' by Protestant workers in their attitudes to their Catholic class comrades.

Their book, moreover, shows a chronic lack of understanding of how workers' ideas change. When they dismiss 1932 for example, they ignore, as was mentioned above, the crucial extent to which mass actions on the terrain of class struggle - such as the Outdoor Relief Strike - can make a minority more responsive to socialist propaganda. Even the success of the Stalinists among a layer of Protestants is testimony to this.

At a time when the objective situation of another capitalist crisis is once again exposing the spurious nature of the claim that Protestants have a stake in the health of the Northern Ireland capitalist state, it is unfortunate that the authors have provided such a lacklustre analysis of an historic struggle with such obvious lessons for the struggle of today.

Borrow this book from the library as an antidote to the bourgeois smear that the workers of Belfast have no history independent of competing nationalisms, but better still help the Communist Workers' Organisation in the work of building a real revolutionary leadership which can turn a favourable objective situation to the permanent advantage of the working class, instead of against it.

\* \* \* \* \*

For contact with the CWO in Ireland write as follows without mentioning the name:

P.O. Box 117,  
Head Post Office,  
Tomb Street,  
Belfast BT1 1AA,  
Northern Ireland.

# TOWARDS PROLETARI

## 5. THE PROLETARIAT TAKES POWER

### THE RUSSIAN PROLETARIAT COMES TO POWER

"On the evening of October 24th the Provisional Government had at its disposal little more than 25,000 men. On the evening of October 25th, when preparations were underway for the storming of the Winter Palace, the Bolsheviks assembled about 20,000 Red Guards, sailors and soldiers before that last refuge of the Provisional Government. But within the palace there were not more than 3000 defenders, and many of those left their posts during the night. Thanks to the Bolsheviks' overwhelming superiority there were no serious battles in the capital from October 24th to October 26th, and the total number of those killed on both sides was no more than 15, with no more than 60 wounded.

During these critical hours, as all the main strategic points in the city passed under Bolshevik control (telephone and telegraph exchanges, bridges, railroad stations, the Winter Palace etc.), Petrograd continued on the whole to go about its normal business. Most of the soldiers remained in the barracks, the plants and the factories continued to operate, and in the schools none of the class were interrupted. There were no strikes or mass demonstrations such as had accompanied the February Revolution. The movie theatres (called cinematographias in those days) were filled, there were regular performances in all the theatres, and people strolled as usual on the Nevsky Prospect. The ordinary non-political person would not even have noticed the historic events taking place; even on the streetcar lines, the main form of public transportation in 1917, service remained normal. It was in one of those streetcars that Lenin, in disguise, and his bodyguard Eino Rahja travelled to Smolny late on the evening of the 24th..."

Thus the Soviet dissident historian, Roy Medvedev describes the October Revolution. This picture of Lenin going to the revolution on a tram also conforms with Trotsky's view of those days.

"Demonstrations, street fights, barricades - everything comprised in the usual idea of insurrection - were almost entirely absent. The revolution had no need of solving a problem already solved. The seizure of the governmental machine could be carried through according to plan with the help of comparatively small armed detachments guided from a single centre...the very fact that the resistance of the government came down to a defence of the Winter Palace, clearly defines the place occupied by October 25th in the whole course of the struggle. The Winter Palace was the last redoubt of a regime politically shattered during its eight months existence and conclusively disarmed during the preceding two weeks." (THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION p.1138)

The Russian privileged classes had expected an orgy of looting and murder, political chaos and the collapse of human morality. Instead they were faced with an ordered transition which must have been even more terrifying for them. The proletarian masses had shown they had no need of rulers but could found their own forms of government. Of course this was later turned into a criticism of the October Revolution by the historians of our class enemy who portrayed the proletarian revolution only in terms of its final act. They could thus spread the legend that this was simply a putsch, a coup d'état of a small fanatical group wishing for power for its own sake. It is surprising that such a myth has not collapsed under the weight of its own absurdity. Apart from the fact that the Bolshevik Party had 300,000 members or the fact that it had the active support of nearly every soldier in Petrograd (about 300,000 men), how was it possible for them to have debated publicly the seizure of power in the press for all to read for a fortnight before the final arrest of the Provisional



Revolutionary workers and soldiers

Government? Establishing the proletarian nature of the October Revolution is not our aim here since we take this as a given fact. What we need to look at are the circumstances under which that revolution took place, to examine not only how the proletariat made the Bolshevik party its instrument but also how the tactics of the Bolsheviks were tested in the complex situation of September and October 1917.

### CAN THE BOLSHEVIKS WIN STATE POWER?

The fate of the bourgeois order in Russia was sealed from the moment that the armies of the Kaiser occupied Riga and were poised to go all the way to Petrograd. Lenin however had been arguing for insurrection from the moment he realised that the other so-called socialist parties (the Mensheviks and the SRs), true to their theory of supporting a bourgeois system did not intend to support soviet power. What was worse for him was that as he sat in hiding the Bolshevik Central Committee seemed to be falling for Kerensky's attempts to bolster his tottering rule. In the aftermath of the defeat of Kornilov the Provisional Government called a "Democratic Conference" to try to rally the parties represented in the soviet around bourgeois rule. To Lenin's horror the Bolshevik Central Committee fell for this ruse and participated in this charade (Lenin singled out Trotsky for special praise for arguing for a boycott of this assembly). Furthermore they also agreed to participate in the so-called "Pre-parliament" which Kerensky hoped to use to legitimise the position of his unelected government.

Lenin responded in a text called "From a Publicists Diary" in which he denounced the Central Committee;

"There is not the slightest doubt that at the top of our Party there are noticeable vacillations that may become ruinous ... Not all is well with the 'parliamentary' leaders of our Party; greater attention must be paid to them, there must be greater workers' supervision over them ... Our Party's mistake is obvious. The fighting party of the advanced class need not fear mistakes> What it should fear is persistence in a mistake..." (SELECTED WORKS Vol. 2 pp 340-1)

Not only did the parliamentary leaders persist in mistakes but compounded them by suppressing all Lenin's criticisms of their approach to the Democratic Conference and the future insurrection. Although Lenin wrote thousands of words to stimulate them into action they ensured that the key passages were edited out. In frustration Lenin finally submitted his resignation from the Central Committee but "reserving for myself freedom to campaign amongst the party rank and file". Although the Central Committee did not even

discuss this resignation letter it freed Lenin to take up private correspondence with individuals who were in other Party organisations. This once again revealed that Lenin was not an isolated figure battling against a mediocre party as ALL histories of the Russian Revolution make out. Once the Petrograd Committee learnt of the censorship of the discussion they were outraged against the Central Committee.

In fact the really interesting discussions about the need for insurrection took place in the Petrograd Committee. Here there was no element like Kamenev who wanted a deal with the Mensheviks and who did not really accept the internationalist orientation of the Bolsheviks which had developed out of the Zimmerwald and Kienthal conferences at the beginning of the First World War, which had been given new programmatic shape in Lenin's "Imperialism - the Highest Stage of Capitalism" and which was now obvious in the concerns of the Bolsheviks in Petrograd. In the debate over the need for insurrection the most coherent opponent of Lenin's was Volodarsky. He pointed to the backwardness of Russia and insisted that the Bolsheviks should mark time because the Russian Revolution could only succeed as part of a world revolution. Lenin's supporters agreed that the fate of the Russian Revolution was dependent on the fate of the world revolution. But they argued that the proletariat in backward Russia had been given a chance not yet offered to the working class anywhere else. The Russian workers must seize power and hold on whilst the European revolution developed. This argument for not delaying any longer won the day. Lenin enshrined the internationalist position in his text "The Crisis has Matured". This text like many other written in this period deserves to be read in full but we will content ourselves with just a few lines which indicate the internationalist essence of Bolshevism - the one factor that made it unique in the First World War

"The end of September undoubtedly marked a great turning point in the history of the Russian revolution and, to all appearances, of the world revolution as well... This stage may be called the eve of revolution. Mass arrests of party leaders in free Italy, and particularly the beginning of mutinies in the German army are indisputable symptoms that a great turning point is at hand, that we are on the eve of world-wide revolution... And since of all the proletarian internationalists in all countries only we Russian Bolsheviks enjoy a measure of freedom - we have a legal party and a score or so of papers, we have the Soviets ... of both capitals on our side and we have the support of a majority of the people in a time of revolution - to us the saying 'To whom

# AN OCTOBER

much has been given, of him much will be required, in all justice can and must be applied."

(COLLECTED WORKS Vol. 2 pp 342-3)

It was an argument which won over the party and on October 10th the Central Committee voted to accept in principle the idea of organising the insurrection. It was not simply a victory for one man or even one party but for the international working class. The problem now was how the insurrection would come about.

## THE SOLDIERS BECOME BOLSHEVIKS

As we showed in the previous part of this history (See WORKERS VOICE 36 p.5), the Bolsheviks won over enormous support for their policies well before the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets was called. In fact 80% of the worker delegates to that body were Bolshevik supporters. However this does not mean that the proletariat was imbued with a communist consciousness since this would have been an impossibility under the prevailing conditions. What they did have were concrete demands which accumulated as 1917 wore on. They wanted an end to the war and its associated miseries of food shortages and inflation. They had seen that coalition with the bourgeois Provisional Government only continued the war. Furthermore the Germans continued to advance closer to Petrograd and it was widely believed that Kerensky aimed to allow it to fall into enemy hands so that the revolution there could be crushed. All this meant that the Bolsheviks were bound to increase their support since they were the only party which opposed the war in unambiguous terms and which had all along called for "All power to the Soviets". In October 1917 these issues became tied together as barracks after barracks voted not to obey orders to go to the front and to listen only to the Soviets. Typical of these resolutions was that of the Egorsky Guards Regiment on October 12.

"The pulling out of the revolutionary garrison from Petrograd is needed only by the privileged bourgeoisie as a means of stifling the revolution ... We declare to all who listen that, while refusing to leave Petrograd, we will nonetheless heed the voice of the genuine leaders of the workers and poorer peasantry, that is, the Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies. We will believe in and follow it because everything else is pure treachery and open mockery of the world revolution." (Quoted in RABINOWITCH p.227)

This resolution was passed as part of the final critical struggle for control of the forces in Petrograd. On October 9 Trotsky had been able to get a resolution passed in the Petrograd Soviet which called for peace, the removal of the Kerensky government and, most significantly proposed that the defence of Petrograd be undertaken by the Soviet itself. As a result of its acceptance this proposal created the famous Military Revolutionary Committee which was to coordinate the practical seizure of power on October 25th. Contrary to later Stalinist myths the committee was not set up as a premeditated co-ordinator of the takeover. It only became so because the Mensheviks refused to take part in it. The committee was thus composed solely of Bolsheviks and Left SRs who were united on the need to transfer power to the soviets. Furthermore the resolution to set up the MRC came BEFORE the Bolshevik Central Committee finally accepted Lenin's arguments about an immediate seizure of power. The final proof that the MRC was not foreseen as the organiser of the October Revolution was that Lenin, and most Bolsheviks (with the exceptions of Trotsky and Volodarsky), looked to the Bolsheviks own Military Organisation to carry out the practical preparations. However the latter, which had gone in for adventurism in July, had been so severely criticised within the party that it now did not want to get its fingers burnt again. Their preparations were so deliberate and cautious that in the end

От Военно-Революционного Комитета при Петроградском Совете  
Рабочих и Солдатских Депутатов.

## Къ Гражданамъ Россіи

Временное Правительство низложено. Государственная власть перешла въ руки органа Петроградскаго Совета Рабочихъ и Солдатскихъ Депутатовъ Военно-Революціоннаго Комитета, стоящаго во главѣ Петроградскаго пролетариата и гарнизона.

Дѣла, за которые боролся народъ: немедленное прекращеніе демократическаго мира, отмена помещичьей собственности на землю, рабочій контроль надъ производствомъ, созданіе Совѣтскаго Правительства — это дѣла обещаны.

ДА ЗДРАВСТВУЕТЪ РЕВОЛЮЦІЯ РАБОЧИХЪ, СОЛДАТЪ И КРЕСТЬЯНЪ

Военно-Революціонный Комитетъ при Петроградскомъ Советѣ Рабочихъ и Солдатскихъ Депутатовъ.

25 октября 1917 г. 10 ч. утра.

Proclamation of proletarian power Oct 1917

they played a subsidiary, rather than a leading role.

The chief reason for this was, as with so many issues in 1917 the bourgeoisie's imperialist desires to continue the war. The war had brought the fall of Tsardom, it would now finally bring the end of the Russian bourgeoisie and their social democratic lap dogs in the SRs and Menshevik Parties. In view of the fact that Kerensky needed the Petrograd garrison at the front and in view of the fact that the troops would not go Kerensky was in fact faced with a mutiny from the moment the troops put themselves under the leadership of the Soviet's MRC. Once Kerensky and his Petrograd commander General Polkovnikov realised this it was already too late. The MRC had managed to get commissars loyal to the Soviet elected in most of the regiments. When Kerensky realised he had few reliable troops in the capital he telegraphed for troops from the front but was told that the troops there were so "infested with Bolshevism" that they would refuse to move unless told the purpose of their transfer. In short the Provisional Government was already virtually paralysed. When Kerensky finally did act on October 23 it was to call for the arrest of all the Bolsheviks who were out on bail after the July Days (this included all the military leaders of the party) and to close down the Bolshevik press for sedition. But in order to carry out these measures he had to rely on cadets from officer training schools, a women's shock battalion and a rifle regiment of war wounded. The forcible seizure of the Trud press where Rabochii Put, a Bolshevik paper addressed to workers, was published, was the signal for the Military Revolutionary Committee to react. The press was soon in workers hands again and troops loyal to the MRC persuaded those thinking of responding to Kerensky's appeals to remain neutral. As with the Kornilov affair troops being moved towards the capital were also persuaded not to assist the counter-revolution.

Militarily there were now no obstacles to a seizure of power by the working class but there remained the question of when and how. This debate, which had raged in the Bolshevik Party throughout September had still not been finally resolved despite the famous vote of Oct 10. Whilst some members of the MRC wanted the immediate overthrow of Kerensky other Bolsheviks still saw such an uprising as either wrong or premature. Trotsky summarised the situation correctly.

"The government is powerless; we are not afraid of it because we have sufficient strength ... Some of our comrades, for example Kamenev and Riazanov, do not agree with our

assessment of the situation. However we are leaning neither to the right or to the left. Our tactical line has been developed by developing circumstances. We grow stronger every day. Our task is to defend ourselves and gradually to expand our sphere of authority so as to build a solid foundation for tomorrow's Congress of Soviets." Quoted in RABINOWITCH p.253

This was not how Lenin liked it of course. After seven weeks of campaigning for an immediate uprising against a defeated enemy, he could not contain himself. For the second time in a month he disobeyed the Central Committee's instructions to remain in hiding and took his famous tram ride to the Bolshevik headquarters at the Smolny Institute. He had already sent an appeal to lower levels of the Party urging them to act before the Central Committee. It is a summary of all he had argued before.

"History will not forgive revolutionaries for procrastinating when they could be victorious today (and they certainly will be victorious today), while they risk losing much tomorrow, in fact they risk losing everything.

If we seize power today, we seize it not in opposition to the soviets but on their behalf.

The seizure of power is the task of the uprising, its political purpose will become clear after the seizure.

It would be a disaster, or a sheer formality, to await the wavering vote of October 25. The people have the right and are in duty bound to decide such questions, not by a vote, but by force, in critical moments of the revolution...

The government is tottering. It must be given the deathblow at all costs. To delay action is fatal."

In fact both positions contain important elements of the truth. Trotsky recognised that there was no further chance for a new Kornilov to appear and that things were moving quickly enough as it was to a final denouement (and Trotsky was amongst the most active in ensuring the process was speeded-up). Trotsky also knew something Lenin didn't - namely, that the composition of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets would be overwhelmingly for the overthrow of the Provisional Government. Lenin feared that it would still contain enough Mensheviks and SRs to postpone any decision on soviet power until the Constituent Assembly "which cannot possibly be favourable to us" met. He wanted to present the other "socialist" parties with a fait accompli. If the Mensheviks rejected it then they would expose themselves as bourgeois in front of the working class. In fact this is almost how things turned out.

## PROLETARIAN OCTOBER

The October Revolution has been called the best planned revolution of all time. And so it was. A militant proletariat steeled in battle and with its own political instrument in the Bolshevik Party took power in the most orderly of mass actions in history. However this should not obscure certain facts which are characteristic of the relation of party and class. The Bolshevik Central Committee never at any time decided on the date for insurrection. It was simply overruled by the march of events and it was the Bolshevik controlled Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet which directed the final attack. Even here though the real political leadership of the Bolshevik Party lay not in the committee rooms of Smolny but on the streets.

When Kerensky sent cadets to close the bridges over the Neva (thus cutting Petrograd centre from the working class districts on

continued on page 7

## INTERNATIONAL:

## THE NEVER ENDING FANTASIES OF FOREIGN DEBT

## INTRODUCTION

The major symptom of the unending spiral of the capitalist crisis is the problem of debt. Ten years ago the CWO predicted that international loans would be the means by which the world's capitalist classes would buy time. This has been fully confirmed but so has our prediction that this would only store up further insoluble crises for the future. Today the big banks are already writing off debts (Citicorps has written off 25% of its debts whilst Midland in the UK has just taken out a share issue simply to cover its bad debts in Latin America). Brazil, the eighth largest industrial power in the world is still paying for its forced growth of the 70s. Two years ago when it found that it was repaying \$24 billions whilst receiving not a penny in new loans its government, to the applause of leftists and third worldists everywhere declared the so-called Funaro plan which effectively meant that Brazil suspended all debt repayments.

This article has been sent to us by the comrades of the Argentinian group Emancipacion Obrera. It was originally published in Cuadernos para Pensar y Actuar No. 19 in December 1985. We are publishing it in two extracts because it gives a view from "the Third World" on the debt crisis. What the comrades have written is generally coherent with the way in which we pose the problem. What is particularly interesting about this first extract is that it reveals that countries aren't the victims of the imperialist system but part of the same network of international capitalist interests. It is a timely reminder that communists fight not on the terrain of nations but classes and the working class of both the metropolises and the periphery have the same interests in fighting the capitalist system.

## THE DEBT CRISIS

Nothing is more talked about (and with so much ill-feeling) as foreign debt. The principle source of all evil, an absolute cure for unhappiness: debt and its non-payment have been the central themes of political campaigns, conferences, minor theses, articles, Latin American and global summits. They are the programmatic points and central themes of the political activity of the traditional left.

Against those who maintain that the refusal to pay debts and break with 'dependence' passes for the revolutionary struggle against exploitation, we try to show that in reality these projects constitute the firmest opposition to any revolutionary change, that they divide the working class and represent the defence of the left-wing variety of capitalist exploitation. We will show that these programmes, far from leading to a mobilisation against exploitation and injustice, only reinforce the present domination of the ruling class and give it more oxygen for a new lease of life.

## THE LITTLE IMPERIALISTS

The first thing to be made clear is that none of these individuals and political parties are defending workers' interests. On the contrary, they are defending the interests of capital. The bourgeoisie has always tried to camouflage its interests under the banner of the 'nation', the 'state' or the 'people' and this is clearly seen in the case of the 'anti-imperialist' (i.e. nationalist) left in Argentina. In one of the latest and widely popularised works of these third world paladins(1) it is recorded that the world's 500 biggest banks are the principal creditors to Latin America. It shows that 22% of these are North American, 12% Japanese, 9% German, 5% Italian, 4% British and 3% French. The obvious fact that this adds up to 55% is not mentioned. What of the remaining 45%? Are they by any chance banks from the "Third World"?

The fact is that the invention of the '3rd world' is only a way to hide that these countries are also capitalist and the attempt to set the 'first world' against the 'third' is nothing but an inter-capitalist, inter-bourgeois encounter. By definition the 'anti-imperialist' left is only opposed to some countries (USA, UK etc) and is in favour of others. In no way does it promote the interests of the working class against its own ruling class, against all dominant classes in the world in order to put an end to the world capitalist (imperialist) system. Rather they promote the defence of their own capitalism, which they would like to see stronger and more developed - in other words, bigger and better.

Proof of what we are saying emerges from the figures quoted above regarding the case of Bolivia. Bolivia owes 10% of its debts to the World Bank, another 14% to the International Development Bank but ... who does it owe most to? To Brazil and Argentina! The story doesn't end here. When Bolivia proposed and decided not to pay its foreign debt it met the firm opposition of Argentina and Brazil (besides that of the USA etc.) and this pressure forced Bolivia to religiously pay its debts to the Argentinian, Brazilian and other state and international bodies, allowing it only to postpone repayments to private banks (21% of the total, including Argentinian creditors).

Still it doesn't end here. Argentina is one of Bolivia's main trading partners. It buys natural gas at the very low price of 700m pesos a year. During the democratic government of Alfonsín, Argentina refused to pay for the gas it received (creating problems for Bolivia) and it declared that Bolivia should buy more from Argentina in order to even up the unequal trade balance.

What would the leftists have done if the USA or UK had acted like Argentina? It's not difficult to imagine but since this is Argentina it's supposed to be 'different'. But how is it different? Essentially it is a defence of Argentinian capital when (like any other capital) it has expanded by exploiting wherever it can, speculating, dominating, cornering markets, concentrating itself.

Thus, if we study the real debt composition of many Latin American countries we see that part of this debt is owed to Argentina, Brazil or Mexico and consequently to their nationals.

In the Argentinian case, which is the one we know best, the left closes its eyes to the Argentinian penetration of Uruguay (controlling a large part of its banking and virtually owning one city - Punta del Este - as well as various industries, especially textiles and plastics). Paraguay is also a debtor, as is Peru (to which Argentina recently loaned \$400m) and ... even Cuba. (One of the reasons why Castro speaks of breaking with the IMF and not paying debts is that the USA and the IMF are not Cuba's principal creditors(2) but countries of the so-called 3rd World.)(3)

By creating a Latin-American front which is anti-IMF and anti-yankee the Argentinian left is trying to make an alliance with other bourgeois sectors (in the manner of the EEC) in order to strengthen its own capital as it competes with the leading world powers.

## POVERTY, UNEMPLOYMENT ... DUE TO THE DEBT?

Foreign debt is presented as the cause of poverty, unemployment, hunger, etc. This is the principal banner of all these left tendencies. It's what makes their speeches at times appear credible and undoubtedly it is the most colossal lie they fabricate.

Our aim is not to defend one of the mechanisms by which the international bourgeoisie extorts surplus value from the working class and distributes it worldwide. However, it is difficult to conceive of capitalism without such a distribution throughout the ruling class or for this distribution of the fruits of exploitation to

exist without exploitation itself. Thus it is completely mistaken to imagine that what does not go to any particular sector of the bourgeoisie will end up in the hands of the proletariat. It is just the opposite and the debt itself proves it. Let's see why.

To start with, as the 3rd Worldists themselves recognise, the extent of the present debt is relatively recent, stemming from the last decade. Argentinian trade unionists who were in Cuba last month declaring in favour of a moratorium said that debt was almost non-existent in 1955 and was minimal even in 1976. But there is no doubt that before, during and after these dates the working class has been exploited, has suffered repression, hunger and unemployment more or less according to the years and as a function of the capitalist cycle itself and the relations between classes.

Thus the last number of P y A analysed the dizzy process of indebtedness where dollars are received from abroad but nothing is paid. That is to say the local bourgeoisie and the State receive money ... but where does it go? Not a single dollar reaches the workers.

And so the years pass during which not a penny in interest or capital is paid but new debts are contracted in order to refinance the previous ones without paying or transferring a single dollar of that received. There certainly is hunger, unemployment, low wages, ... And so we have reached the most recent years when capital surpluses are not so large and investors (everywhere, including Argentina) lay claim to recover their interest on loans made. The depressing crisis of world capitalism makes all this more and more difficult. The biggest loans exceed any possibility of repayment. And problems begin ... But before passing to that let's note that unemployment, low wages, repression exist though not a single penny of the debt has been repaid and when, on the contrary, they have obtained refinancing and new loans: loans which always end up with the ruling class (in both private and State hands).

All this is constantly hidden by the leftist agents of capitalism. By putting themselves against the creditors they are in fact defending the debtors who have in effect received those dollars to carry on their own business of exploiting their own working class.

To be continued

CWO PAMPHLETS No.1    £1.00

WAR    RECONSTRUCTION    CRISIS    WAR

ONLY REVOLUTION CAN BREAK THE CYCLE

## THE ECONOMIC FOUNDATIONS OF CAPITALIST DECADENCE & MONEY, CREDIT AND CRISIS

COMMUNIST WORKERS ORGANISATION

Available from group address 125p inc p&p

## REVIEW:

# ULSTER WORKERS CAN UNITE AGAINST CAPITALIST SECTARIANISM

R. Munck & B. Rolston. *Belfast in the Thirties - An Oral History*. Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1987. 209 pages. £9.95.

An ostensibly semi-academic bourgeois research project, and what is more one conducted using the techniques of 'experimental' and trendy oral history, would not usually warrant review in a communist publication. However as the authors themselves are quick to admit, the book was inspired by a political desire to draw the lessons of the period under study for the contemporary "labour movement", and ends with a quite explicit call for greater sophistication among today's so-called 'socialists'. In other words the book, which had a popular launch and a widespread critical reception, is an articulation of leftist politics today with thankfully little attempt at a veil of outright bourgeois 'objectivity'.

It is for this reason that the work is of interest to revolutionaries although, admittedly, the style of the book does provide an entertaining and worthwhile insight into the psychology of workers faced with a crisis in the assumptions of bourgeois ideology. Either way the book is given substance by drawing on a fascinating period of workers' history in Northern Ireland.

## HISTORY REWRITTEN

The book is constructed around a series of interviews with workers and political activists, specially selected either for their involvement in the events of the thirties or for their more general experience of working class life at the time (e.g. 'archetypal' Protestant shipyard and mill workers were included). The stated aim is a reconstruction of mass attitudes at a time when, according to leftist mythology, old sectarian ideas were apparently successfully challenged for a brief period before violently reasserting themselves in the infamous "pogroms" of the mid-thirties.

"If normal Belfast politics is about sectarianism, then the appearance of any other political form, for example, socialism, is seen as abnormal. The abnormal requires an explanation." (p.5)

The best sections of the book are those which deal with the myth of privilege for Protestant workers. Although skilled workers, especially in shipbuilding, were almost universally Protestant, the bulk of Protestant workers suffered the same austerity as Catholics as the fortunes of the Orange State declined from the early twenties onwards. In fact the testimonies in the book demonstrate that it was precisely the Protestant areas where bad housing and unemployment were most severe that were the breeding grounds for the most excessive sectarianism, as workers turned on Catholic rivals for the meagre crumbs of casual work. This, of course, has continued to be the trend until the present day, the current crisis throwing up increasing numbers of lumpenised and unemployed Protestant workers who tend to be the backbone of populist loyalism.

The extent to which this sectarianism was challenged in the thirties, particularly in the struggles of the unemployed, is the central subject of the book. At the height of these struggles, in 1932, unemployment in Belfast is estimated to have been 48% (as high as 60% in shipbuilding and dependent trades). This unprecedented level of unemployment, together with the fact that workers under the Unionist régime could expect to receive only half the benefit of some of their counterparts in Great Britain, provides the background for the now legendary Outdoor Relief Strike and riots of October 1932, one of the few occasions when Protestant and Catholic workers have struggled shoulder to shoulder in Ulster.

The details of the strike are quite well known, but the book does provide the occasional insight to challenge the Stalinist mythology. When Outdoor Relief rates were to be cut further (these were payments to the unemployed for menial work in lieu of wages) 2,000 of Belfast's Outdoor Relief workers struck, demanding an increase instead and secured a complete stoppage throughout the city with a mass flying picket to other unemployed centres. The ultra-paranoid Unionist régime responded in its usual manner by baton charging workers'

demonstrations and mobilising regular troops immediately. A week into the strike on October 11 the biggest demonstration was planned, despite a police ban, which was to converge from five points. The aborted attempt to hold this march was what led to the most serious clashes with the forces of repression, which in turn were the most serious disturbances among the unemployed anywhere in the British Isles at the time. Two workers (one Protestant, one Catholic) were killed and several wounded as police resorted to live rounds to deal with widespread and continuous rioting, which effected both Protestant and Catholic working class areas and, most significantly, involved workers fighting in one another's districts for fear of recognition by local police.

Munck and Rolston's book isn't afraid to broach the question of the numbers active in the movement and involved in violence, and replaces the Stalinist myth that great swathes of the city's population took part with a more sober assessment that the activists were quite limited numerically and especially geographically. However the authors tend to leave their correction at the level of cynicism, and seem to fail to understand that the active minority may still have been significant, given that the level of consciousness will inevitably be heterogeneous among different sections of the class. With the benefit of hindsight the authors tend to underestimate the extent to which a significant number of workers, especially Protestants, were radicalised by the movement, although they were swallowed by the Stalinism of the Communist Party of Ireland (or Revolutionary Workers' Group as it was known then).

The book is good on the involvement of the IRA in workers' violence; its interviews demonstrating that it shied away from any involvement in the struggle, although individual volunteers may have deserted the leadership line in specific incidents. The story told of the IRA role by its modern historians reflects an attempt to bury an embarrassing rightist past which does not suit its new found 'socialist' garb.

The work is also good on the connection between the violence of the Outdoor Relief Strike and the general anti-authority element in "conventional" Ulster politics. Then as now the tendency to confront the forces of the state directly is the only beneficial side effect that can be attributed to the competing nationalist approaches.

Probably the book's most serious flaw is its failure to deal with the damage done to the unemployed struggles by the outright reformists of the NI Labour Party and the unions. It was these elements which sabotaged the movement of 1932 and negotiated a compromise settlement just when the fight was at its most united and intimidating to the Unionist régime. Here as elsewhere the authors show that their loyalties lie not with a direct confrontation with the state, but with the modern heirs to this reformist tradition.

## REGRESSION?

1935 saw the worst sectarian violence in Belfast since the formation of the state, with at least 11 deaths and 500 injuries in a matter of weeks. In fact the original aim of *Belfast in the Thirties* was to trace the regression from the heady days of "socialist" politics among the workers in 1932, to the return of the Protestants to the Unionist brand of bourgeois ideology three years later. The authors' attempts to explain this were abandoned during the project in favour of an analysis which saw the politics of "socialism" (class struggle) and sectarianism as relatively autonomous. That class struggle always had and always would exist in Ireland's premier industrial city, but that this did not mean that Protestant workers in struggle would abandon sectarianism, because they are tied to the ideology by historical origin, culture, etc.

"To try and brush aside sectarianism as a temporary aberration which exists solely because of conniving bosses and political leaders and which can be overcome by the introduction of correct

continued on page 3

## OCTOBER 1917

continued from page 5

the Vyborg side) just as he had done in July

"they were challenged by an irate crowd of citizens, many of them carrying weapons. Forced to give up their arms, the cadets were escorted humiliatingly back to their academy; as nearly as can be determined, this action took place without any specific directives from the Military Revolutionary Committee. Similarly, as soon as the struggle for the bridges began, Ilyin-Zhenevsky (a leader of the Bolshevik Military Organisation -CWO), also acting on his own, saw to it that garrison soldiers took control of the smaller Grenadersky and Samsonevsky bridges..." (RABINOWITCH p.261)

In short, despite all the planning and all the debates the revolution was not the work of a minority simply leading a passive majority. The Bolsheviks as a military directing centre were not as well-prepared as Stalinist and Trotskyist histories have made out. Their real success as a leadership of the working class was in imbuing the mass movement with clear goals that all could follow. Thus the Liteiny Bridge was shut by workers acting on their own consciousness of the importance of the situation whilst an individual Bolshevik doesn't wait for instructions from the "centre" but can act on his own initiative in accordance with the demands of the situation. As we have shown throughout this article the Bolsheviks' fitness for the revolutionary task was not the result of some assumed infallibility in strategy and tactics but in the fact that it was a party genuinely rooted in the class conscious vanguard of the working class - and a party capable of learning from its mistakes. In this sense it was the organiser of the proletariat in the October Revolution. Without its general direction of the class vanguard the October Revolution would have become another heroic failure to put on a historical list that is already too long.

The final evidence of the Bolsheviks leadership of the masses came in the figures for the allegiance of the delegates to the Second Soviet Congress which gave the Bolsheviks 300, and the SRs 193 (of which half were Left SRs who supported the overthrow of the Provisional Government) whilst there were only 68 Mensheviks and 14 Menshevik-Internationalists. The remainder were mainly non-affiliated but as the voting soon showed largely followed the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks supported a motion by Martov to establish a coalition government of all socialist parties but this was sabotaged by the Mensheviks and SRs who made it clear they were walking out of the Congress. They hoped to mobilise the proletariat against the Bolsheviks but in fact, as the proletariat supported the Bolsheviks they simply walked in Trotsky's words into "the dustbin of history". This one Menshevik, Sukhanov subsequently realised when he wrote:

"By quitting the Congress, we ourselves gave the Bolsheviks a monopoly of the Soviet, of the masses, and of the revolution."

Despite further attempts by Martov's Menshevik-Internationalists to try to form a coalition including those parties which rejected soviet power the Congress now overwhelmingly endorsed the insurrection. At about the same time the Winter Palace fell into the hands of the working class and the members of the Provisional Government were arrested - the only arrests made by the working class. Kerensky had earlier escaped to try to rally frontline troops. This turned out to be another demonstration of the overwhelming victory of the Bolsheviks since his efforts almost ended in his own arrest. Disguised as a woman he fled Russia to write increasingly mendacious memoirs at Harvard Law School over the next half century.

Meanwhile Lenin had emerged from the shadows of hiding to greet the Congress of Soviets with the simple statement "We shall now proceed to construct the socialist order". The real history of the Russian working class revolution had begun...

# WORKERS VOICE

## SOUTH AFRICA : NUM AGAINST THE MINERS

### UNIONS SABOTAGE MINER'S STRIKE

The strike by black goldminers was defeated after three weeks of bitter struggle. Despite 50 000 sackings and mass recruitment of scabs, despite repression which left 6 dead and 250 wounded the miners were determined to continue their struggle and voted to continue at pit head ballots only the day before the union called off the strike.

The workers were demanding a 30% across the board increase together with increased holiday and death payments - last year 681 miners were killed in accidents. The bosses offered a 15 to 23% wage rise incorporating differentials designed to split the more skilled miners from the unskilled, and minor concessions on holidays and death benefits. When this offer was rejected by a decisive pithead ballot the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) ordered the miners to surrender. The general role played by the union and this capitulation in particular clearly illustrate the function which trade unions serve for the capitalist system today, even when, as in South Africa they are only just being legalised, lack a stake in the capitalist order and talk the language of class struggle.

In many ways this strike was a crucial one for the S.A. bosses. It was the longest strike in S.A. history and was the first real test of the new tactics the bosses have adopted for dealing with the class struggle. The central element in these tactics was the creation of black trade unions to control and discipline the class struggle.

### UNIONISATION - THE BOSSES' STRATEGY

By the mid 70's the South African bosses realised the the methods of controlling the class struggle, which had been used for the last 20 years, were no longer effective. Between the banning of black trade unions in 1953 and their legalisation in 1979 the class struggle was met with naked violence. While repression was effective during the reconstruction period following world war

2 it was primarily designed for migrant labour which was unskilled and cheap.

The dramatic fall in the rate of profit in S.A. in the early 70's (from around 17% at the end of the 60's to 8%) caused the bosses to introduce more capital equipment, shed labour and increase productivity by better training. This led to the requirement of a stable skilled black working class and control of the class struggle. This is the primary reason that the S.A. bosses, with Anglo American Mining Corporation at their head, set about creating black trade unions. Obviously, they also hoped for other benefits, such as reducing the cost of labour by replacing well paid white workers with low paid black workers. The bosses have, since the mid 70's, campaigned for an end to statutory reservation of jobs for whites, and it is significant that during this strike the last law reserving mining jobs for white workers was repealed by parliament.

So far these new unions have served the bosses well. Although union members have won pay increases, these have barely kept up with inflation and taken no account of increased productivity. Meanwhile the class struggle has been kept under control. The last miners strike, which took place in 1984 and achieved a 15% pay increase, while inflation was 13%, was called off by the NUM after only one day! The recent strike, though longer and expensive for the bosses, has shown the union is an effective tool for controlling and defeating the miners.

### TACTICS TO WIN

From the start it was clear that this strike could only be won if it was won quickly. This meant generalisation and extension. Only 300 000 miners out of 500 000 struck which meant approximately a third of the mines continued to work. Instead of advocating a campaign of picketting and persuasion of other miners, the union started the strike by urging all miners to return to their "homelands" - places often thousands of miles from the mines! This was an immediate cause of demoralisation and loss of momentum. The union also only aimed to bring out certain "targetted" mines. Other mines were allowed to continue operations, and supposedly the strike would be won through attrition.

The obvious parallel with the British miners strike is even more cruel when one considers the desperate hand to mouth existence of the miners their distant families and dependants, and also the massive 2 million pool of even more desperate unemployed.

From the start the union's emphasis was on legality. Announcing the famous "go home" call the NUM general secretary Ramaphosa said, "this is the only way we can have a peaceful strike in the mining industry." The only way to win the strike was to spread it and clearly this involves breaking the bosses laws and confrontations with the police just as it does in Britain. Instead the NUM proposed passivity while its leaders negotiated with the chamber of mines.

Even if the attempt to spread the strike on the mines had failed there was potential for spreading it elsewhere. In fact, throughout the country there was a mass of strikes going on at the same time. COSATU, the congress of trade unions to which the NUM is affiliated, estimates that at the time

of the strike there were 60 000 steel and engineering workers on strike, 15 000 chemical workers, 20 000 hotel workers, 20 000 postal workers and 10 000 food industry workers all on strike. Any serious attempt to win the strike would have tried to link these struggles whose pay demands were virtually identical. If a linkage had been established with any of these strikes the way would have been opened for spreading the struggle much more widely and calling out non-mining sectors. Instead the NUM and COSATU isolated the struggle, emphasised legality and promoted peace and negotiations, even when the bosses began to fire miners by the thousand.

The anger and will to fight of the miners is shown by their vote to continue the strike even after 50 000 of their fellows had been sacked and mass recruitment of replacement miners was underway. Instead of harnessing this energy to a program which could win the strike, the union isolated it, weakened it and finally directly opposed it by ordering a return to work.

This defeat represents a significant victory for the bosses and a proof that their policy of forming unions has paid off. Not only have they achieved their aim of keeping wages below inflation, the strike was also, as the union intended, much less violent than previous strikes with far less damage to mine property.

### COMMUNIST VOICE

What was missing through these events was a voice speaking for the tactics which could have won the strike, and denouncing the unions as tools of the bosses. In the longer term workers struggles in South Africa can only succeed when the political divisions propagated by black and white nationalism are directly challenged and unity on a class basis forged between black and white workers. If white miners had joined the strike the outcome would have been very different. It is necessary for the communist forces which exist inside South Africa and in the diaspora of exiles to unite to form a communist organisation capable of propagandising for this perspective today.

# C.W.O.

I would like to find out more about the CWO ☐

I would like to help with the activity of the CWO ☐

Name.....

Address.....

.....

.....

Send to: CWO, PO Box 145,  
Head Post Office, Glasgow

## SUBSCRIBE

A year's subscription to WORKERS VOICE is £2.50 or £4 for those outside the UK (to cover postage).

A combined subscription for Workers Voice and COMMUNIST REVIEW (central organ of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party) is £4.50 (UK) or £5.50 (abroad).

If you sympathise with the work of the CWO why not take out a supporters sub of £10? Please make cheques and international money orders out to "CWO Publications" only.

All subscriptions etc should be sent to

BM CWO, LONDON WC1N 3XX

All political correspondence should be sent to our Glasgow address (see back page).