

WORKERS VOICE

COMMUNIST
WORKERS
ORGANISATION

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No 39

UK 30p
US \$1
India 2Rs

FEB/MAR 1988

PALESTINIANS REVOLT

BUT WITHOUT THE PLO

Despite over 40 deaths and countless wounded the resistance of the refugees of the Israeli occupied territories in the Gaza Strip and on the West Bank continues. The world outcry against such atrocities have hardly stirred the combined Labour and Likud government of Israel. The policy to replace bullets with beatings was not a sign of recognition of the Arabs as human beings but the product of the pressure being put on the Israeli government by its paymasters in the USA. And the Israeli Government has 3 billion reasons a year for complying. The USA, the creator and sustainer of Israel, wishes to rebuild its relations with the Arab states which look increasingly fragile since the death of Sadat and the bombing of Tripoli. This is why it has abstained in the votes in the UN condemning Israel. But such acts are merely cosmetic and the Israeli Government knows that it will continue to get support from the USA (particularly in election year). It may no longer shoot children on the streets but it has actually increased the terror by bursting into any Palestinian shack and breaking the bones of the inhabitants. This is because Israel has its own plans for the Gaza Strip and the West Bank...

ZIONIST IMPERIALISM

In the open air market in Haifa where Arab and Jew both shop, a hollowed-out pumpkin was filled with explosive and rolled into the middle of the crowd. 40 men, women and children were blown to pieces by this act of indiscriminate terrorism. It was not an Arab hand which made that bomb but a Jew. The date was 1936. It was the beginning of the Zionist campaign to have Palestine delivered over to them by the British. It worked.

It was the beginning of a terrorist campaign which has continued to the present day. What was unique about this particular terrorist campaign was its success. This was because it enjoyed the support of the Western imperialist powers, particularly the United States. In fact the Zionist terrorist gangs killed more in one day (at Deir Yassin, for example, where 254 men women and children were deliberately and cold-bloodedly murdered in April 1948) than all the Palestinian terrorists managed in twenty years.

It now seems fair to ask if there has ever been a state in history which has benefitted so much from genocide as Israel. First, the horrors of the Nazi holocaust led to the support of the most powerful state in the world for Zionism, then the massacres of Deir Yassin and its like, terrorised the Palestinians into leaving the land which had been allocated to them by the UN partition plan of 1947. In 1982 the Israelis went all the way to Beirut to create the conditions for the massacre of the Palestinian refugees in the camps of Sabra and Chatila. Today it is the turn of the dispossessed Palestinians in the Gaza strip and on the West Bank to feel the iron fist of Zionism.

Since the Declaration of Lord Balfour, the then British Foreign Secretary in 1917 the Zionists have not hidden their aim to claim the whole of Palestine as "Eretz Israel". This isn't the place to go into all the quotes by Weizmann, Ben Gurion et al which reveal the total disregard of the Zionists for the rights of the inhabitants of Palestine. Its good enough to quote



Refugee camps ignite

organisation, Irgun Zvai Leumi in 1947. When the UN partition plan to give the Zionists over half of Palestine was announced he was not satisfied. He thundered that

"Eretz Israel will be restored to the people of Israel. All of it. And for ever."

And once the British shamefacedly and hastily withdrew (in the face of Jewish terrorism) the Zionists put into operation Plan Dalet which aimed at the seizure of Haifa, Jaffa, Acre and Jerusalem. This led to the first Arab-Israeli War and was the first of many Israeli victories. Massacres of Palestinians were carried out to terrorise others into leaving (Deir Yassin being only the most notorious) and the Palestinians were driven into their ghettos in Gaza and on the West Bank. But Gaza and the West Bank belong to "Eretz Israel". In 1956 the Israelis, with British and French support seized Gaza and only gave it up on US insistence. It was Gaza and the West bank which were the first targets of the Israeli military in the Six Day War of 1967. Although the Israelis have only formally annexed East Jerusalem, it is clear that their ultimate aim is eventual integration of these areas into Greater Israel. To prepare for that day Israeli is planting colonies of Zionist settlers in them, throwing more Palestinians off the land. In their place have come the fascist yellow shirts of Rabbi Meir Kahane's followers who ably assist the state in murdering Palestinian youth.

In the Gaza strip (28 miles long by 5 miles wide) some 640,000 Palestinians are crowded together (446,000 of

NURSES AND THE NHS

CAPITALISM IS BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH

If proof were needed, the sight of nurses and others in the 'caring services' taking strike action gives the lie to Conservative propaganda that only the "greedy" and "selfish" go on strike. A more selfless set of workers is difficult to imagine. But far from recognising the value of nursing skills and health care, the Government has exploited their sense of duty to the patient to the full in order to keep wages at a pittance and get away with the increasingly appalling cuts in the service. In this it has been aided and abetted by the Royal College of Nursing with its no strike, "why don't you trample over us?" rule. The RCN encourages nurses to think of themselves as Florence Nightingales following a "calling"; caring angels who are far above the mundane things in life like having enough money to live. The reality, though, is rather different. Over the past few years 30,000 nurses have been leaving the 'profession' annually. A second job or permanent overtime to make ends meet seem less and less worthwhile when, as so many have said "the health service is crumbling round our ears".

But, when nurses heard the news in January that the Government intended a blatant CUT in their wages by withdrawing "special duty allowances" (things like night-shift!) the flood-tide burst. At last, a response of unified resistance rather than individual despair and disillusion. The ruling class was quite aware of the significance of the Manchester strike: nurses have realised that if they want to protect patients and jobs the only course open to them is that of class struggle. Further reports that the Government has no intention of following the recommendations of the "review body" added fuel to the flames. While Thatcher expressed "amazement" that the nurses should strike when they were only allowed a 'pay review' on the undertaking that they would never go on strike (with no undertaking from the Government that it would follow the review's recommendations), the one-day protest strike in February attracted thousands of nurses.

Harsn reality had undermined the Victorian ideology of the RCN and is forcing more and more nurses to recognise that their human concern for their patients does not exclude them from the working class. Many nurses have left the RCN and joined one of the Health Service unions (NUPE or Cohse) in order to take part in the strike action. But while the nurses have turned to the trade unions to express their resistance and will to fight, what sort of struggle are the unions themselves promoting?

It may have surprised some newcomers to Cohse to hear from their leaders on the day after the 3rd February strike that it would be unwise to hold further strikes since this would risk "losing the sympathy of the public". But who is "the public"? "The public" is none other than society as a whole, a society divided into workers and bosses and their hangers-on. Obviously the ruling class will not support nurses or anyone else striking. But aren't the miners who joined nurses' picket lines in different parts of the country part of "the public". Aren't the bus drivers who went out of their way to gather nurses' leaflets for their passengers and workmates part of "the public"? Aren't the pensioners who joined

CWO PERSPECTIVES:

PART 2: THE COURSE OF IMPERIALISM AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE

1. Within the framework of a drive to world war, which is capitalism's solution to its otherwise insuperable economic problems, there are periods when the pace increases, with multiplication of tension and arms expansion, and periods when the pace is slowed down, and even appears to go into reverse. The tendencies unleashed by the crisis in the social, economic and political spheres are neither unilinear nor independent. While the inexorable logic of capitalism is still towards war, we are today - as we were in the early 1970s - the onset of the crisis - in a period of superficial improvement in the relationship between the USA and USSR.

2. The multiplication of crises in the early 1980s - Nicaragua, Iran, Kampuchea - combined with an intensification of the economic crisis to its worst levels, and massive re-armaments programmes, gave the period an almost pre-war atmosphere, with talks of "winnable" nuclear wars on both sides. Yet the fact that none of these conflicts developed (though they might have) into issues involving the FUNDAMENTAL interests of both blocs (the pre-condition for war), combined with continuing economic chaos, has led to the present period of renewed detente, as both powers struggle with the burden of unproductive arms expenditures.

3. These pressures lie at the root of the talks between Gorbachev and Reagan which reached the agreement to remove medium range nuclear missiles - SS20s and Cruise - from Europe. These weapons are offensive, tactical weapons and their removal is a sign that neither bloc is AT THE MOMENT ready to launch war. By only removing 4% of nuclear arsenals this is not a significant economic coup, but if attempts to reduce worldwide nuclear arsenals by 50% by 1990 are successful (largely by scrapping obsolete weapons), Reagan hopes this will enable him to slash his budget deficit, and Gorbachev hopes that it will allow the transfer of resources to the economic overhaul of Russia. What the arms talks have achieved is not so much any disarmament measures of significance, but an agreement not to ESCALATE THE ARMS RACE FURTHER. Further increases in arms spending would impose burdens on the populations of both the USA and USSR which could only prove tolerable in a run up to a real war, for which the population was acting as cannon fodder.

4. In the meantime, each power is attempting to homogenise and secure its own bloc. Following on Reagan's success in getting widespread NATO support for the attack on Libya, comes the coup of organising the task force in the Gulf to "protect" western shipping. Pressure on Japan to re-arm (and ease US economic problems) has proved successful, and the petulance of Greece and Spain over renewing NATO base facilities to the US has evaporated with the promise of more US aid.

5. Similarly, Russia has been trying to remove the threat on its Asian flank by normalising relations with China, even at the price of hinting at previously impermissible "concessions" on issues like the disputed border. Gains have been made in the Middle East, with new trade deals with Iran, diplomatic recognition from Saudi Arabia and the charter of Soviet protection for the Kuwaiti tanker fleet. Gorbachev's peace offensive and "glasnost" propaganda have been used as rallying cries for the re-assertion of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe.

6. It is thus vitally important for communists to argue that the present outbreak of brotherly love is but an interlude on the course to war. Just as we expose every mini-recovery of capitalism as a very expression of its inexorable decline, so the patching up of disputes between imperialist powers, and moratoriums on armaments - which were a feature of the lead up to World War I - are simply expressions of the fact that the

imperialist powers are NOT YET ready for war. When all expedients for resolving the crisis are exhausted, and when an issue concerning the vital interests of both powers emerges, then we will be on the eve of World War III, unless, of course, the working class imposes its own solution onto the general crisis of capitalist society.

7. The general situation of the class struggle world wide remains unchanged. There is widespread calm, punctuated by isolated outbreaks, in the heartlands, and agitation, with non-proletarian admixtures, in the periphery. Where the class is most concentrated and most powerful, it is most passive; and where it is most active, it faces the greatest obstacles to the success of its struggle, ideologically and physically.

8. In large areas of the capitalist periphery the combination of increasing debt and falling commodity prices has brought economic devastation. It has been argued, for example, that over large swathes of Latin America, such as Brazil, Uruguay and Ecuador, living standards have fallen by 50% a decade. Similar falls have occurred in the former "miracle" economies of the Pacific (e.g. the Philippines). Although the threat of default which pre-occupied the Western banks in the early 1980s has receded, the cost of debts has been widespread attacks on food subsidies and welfare measures.

9. In these circumstances the proletariat is thrust into the ranks of those "without resources" and, devoid of leadership, finds it difficult to separate itself from the nationalist or democratic agitation that has swept countries like Brazil, South Africa and Korea. Caught between the machination of the national bourgeoisie, and the increasingly frantic forces of the petty-bourgeoisie (such as lies behind the ethnic violence in Sri Lanka, Fiji and India), the proletariat has difficulty in seeing a way forward.

10. This makes all the more vital the building of communist nuclei in the periphery, which the CWO is contributing to by our work in India and Latin America. These nuclei will not emerge spontaneously from the struggle, but will have to be won for communist politics by a full and free debate. In addition to this work, the CWO has to address itself to related, theoretical tasks. We have to deepen our understanding of the agrarian question, which is a key issue everywhere in the periphery, and we have to address the issue of industrial development in the periphery. With, for example, Brazil and Korea set to by-pass the UK as industrial powers it is clear that simplistic assertions of the impossibility of development in the "Third World" are impermissible. Again, we assert that the theoretical tasks are not finally accomplished - indeed, they never are.

11. While there is no doubt that the struggle for communism can begin in the semi-developed areas of the periphery, it is also true that it can only be completed in the proletarian heartlands of Europe and the USA. However, with exceptions that, as with all exceptions, merely prove the rule, the working class of Europe and America is more quiescent than in living memory. Those who exaggerate the significance of the exceptions, whether in the German steel works or the Spanish shipyards, ignore this fact at their peril. Their refusal to face reality means they can play no constructive part in changing it.

12. The class responded to the crisis of capitalism without a leadership and without a programme. Therefore, however it had fought - and it fought sometimes heroically - it was doomed to be defeated. The ideology and forms of organisation used by the workers everywhere in Europe led to the massive defeats from 1979 onwards as the capitalists' margin for manoeuvre declined. These

massive defeats have led to the present level of demoralisation and passivity.

13. As our attempt to build an organisation centres in the first place in Britain, it is essential that we concern ourselves with the specificities of the local situation. After the years of the widespread class struggles of the 1970s, culminating in the waves of 1972-4, and 1978-9, the recession associated with Thatcher's early years (and defeat of the steel workers) led to a residue in class action 1981-4. After the defeat of the miners strike and Wapping, the class struggle fell flat on its face. The Tories boast of the lowest strike figures for 50 years; in fact they are the lowest for over 80 years! Again, we do not intend to attempt to prove the contrary by stitching together every minor strike taking place at present. What we have to do is EXPLAIN the reality and OUTLINE the conditions for its transformation.

14. In addition to the defeats inflicted on it, certain other factors have weakened the British working class. In the first place a large part of the industrial proletariat (around one third) has been eliminated from production. Often this process has affected the largest concentrations of industrial workers, and those traditionally best-organised and most combative. For those that remain, a massive restructuring of the industrial process, accompanied by huge rises in the rate of exploitation (productivity) has taken place.

15. In the rest of the employed class there has been a great growth of part-time work (part time workers now constitute one third of the total workforce), of short-term contracts of employment, and of exploitation under the disguised form of "self-employment" (in the building industry this amounts to one third of the labour force). All these are measures imposed on a class that is defeated, and they further weaken its ability to fight.

16. In addition, as we have demonstrated in numerous articles in WORKERS VOICE, the growth of RELATIVE PAUPERISATION for the mass of the class through productivity rises, has not been accompanied by generalised ABSOLUTE PAUPERISATION. For those in work, living standards, on average, have remained stable or risen, though the "social wage" (e.g. health care) has deteriorated. Absolute pauperisation has been confined to the old, the sick, single parents and the unemployed. With the partial exception of the latter, these strata do not form the "class with radical chains" (Marx) that can challenge capitalist society.

17. Furthermore, the British working class has been subjected to an ideological attack of intense proportions. Propaganda about "economic recovery" (i.e. by 1987 production had regained 1979 levels) and about "people's capitalism" via privatisation and council house sales attempted to convince workers that there were individual rather than collective solutions to their problems. While not exaggerating the effect of this, in the general atmosphere it would be foolish to dismiss it, vide the rise in the Tory working class vote in the south of England in the last 10 years.

18. We have - alone in the communist milieu - opened up a debate on the historical significance of Thatcherism. While this debate is not completed or closed, the outlines of our conclusions are that Thatcherism represents NOT the economic recovery of the UK, but its adoption of a partially parasitic role on the world economy, as its means to economic survival. Abandoning any real attempt to defend domestic industry, Thatcherism represents an attempt to establish Britain as a "service" nation to the rest of the western capitalist bloc, accepting its loss of industrial might and paying its way by earnings from insurance, tourism, foreign loans etc. This

gives Thatcher a tremendous power to deal with the working class, since the protection of domestic industry is no longer the main priority.

19. It would require a generalised capitalist recovery to allow the UK to perform the role of a super Switzerland in the western bloc, a recovery that will not occur. The real failure of Thatcherism is concealed by the continuing rentability of the UK government and economy due to two factors. Firstly, the receipts from privatisation, around £5bn a year, are sufficient to pay for Trident; but secondly, and more importantly, the earnings, both private and in taxation, from North Sea oil, from which the government creams off around £15bn a year. The earnings from North Sea oil cover, with a surplus, Britain's deficit on manufactured goods.

20. Thatcherism is thus a transient phenomenon, and not a permanent new configuration of bourgeois politics in the UK. The stock market crash killed Reaganomics in the USA; Thatcher's attempts to make us a nation of property-owning democrats will flounder when the oil runs out and when "the family silver" (state assets) is all sold. Nevertheless, despite further attempts which are planned in Britain to cut the social wage, we can also say that for the foreseeable future the conditions for a generalised revival of the class struggle in Britain DO NOT EXIST.

21. It is in the light of the above schematic account of the world and UK situation that we have to address the tasks of the CWO in the coming period - a period when NEITHER generalised class struggle, NOR inter-imperialist war are likely to occur.

22. Having built up the skeletal structure (a press etc) and activities (meetings, leaflets) of an organisation in the period since the mid 1970s, we cannot abandon it, even in a period of social calm. Rather we have to keep it in existence for the social upheavals ahead, and as a source of training for the cadres of the future in the tasks of revolutionary work. However, the undeniable events that we have outlined mean that we have more need for, and more time for, a shift towards theoretical work.

23. It is not just that the tasks of maintaining the organisation tend to take precedence, especially in times of high class activity, over the education and training of our members. It is also the case that many new issues have arisen in communist politics in the last decade, and many things have not happened in the way that we expected them to. There are whole new areas of theoretical work needed, where solutions cannot be provided by the political nostrums of the past, but require a fresh approach.

24. At the moment, when such issues occur, they are dealt with often in an unsatisfactory "one-off" and journalistic manner, and the thinking is not homogenised throughout the group. But we must face these issues - the restructuring of the productive relations in the crisis and the composition of the class, the question of privatisations and of the revival of "classical" bourgeois economics, the agrarian question, a theoretical treatment of the housing question, the issues of peripheral economic development, of the trend towards tariffs and autarchy, of the role of the trade unions in the actual stage of capitalist restructuring - the issues are legion. The organisation which best deals with such issues theoretically will be best placed to deal with the revival of class struggle which lies on the historical agenda for the 1990s.

ITALIAN SCHOOLS COBAS

INTRODUCTION

Since the Spring of last year the Italian State has been confronted by strikes from first one then other sectors of its public service workers. Like the U.S. Italy is running a budget deficit (11.4% of GDP) and like everywhere else the Government is cutting public spending. We are all familiar with the consequences of such cuts: poorer health and welfare services; increased workloads and staffing cutbacks; deteriorating buildings, equipment and safety standards; the introduction of "new conditions of service" (i.e. extra duties in return for thinly-disguised pay cuts and as often as not a fiercely competitive pay structure designed to pit worker against worker). The details may vary but the overall situation is the same. Thatcher's Government hasn't yet dared to attack pensioners head-on as the Italian Government did by cutting state pensions (and provoking a pensioners' demonstration in Rome) but any British teacher would recognise the similarities between Baker's new conditions of service and the Italian State's attempts to introduce what it calls greater "professionalism" into education. Railworkers in France would easily recognise the same kind of decline in wages and working conditions which provoked their wildcat strikes last year.

Yet the perpetual outbreak of strikes and demonstrations has received virtually no coverage from the mainstream press in Britain. This is not just a sign of the parochialism of the British bourgeoisie: it is part of the media's policy to remain silent as far as possible about events in the international class war which could show the way forward to workers in other parts of the world. And if the events in Italy over recent months have not brought down the state they have challenged one of the main pillars of the established order: the trade unions and their work contracts negotiated in the present spirit of "realism". For the capitalist class a wildcat strike which doesn't keep to the rules of their game is bad enough but when ordinary workers begin to deliberately organise themselves outside of the unions the prospect is more frightening. From the perhaps unlikely area of public service employees the Italian working class has given us a glimpse of how workers in general could create forms of struggle which would help to reverse the balance of class forces. Despite the limitations of the rank and file committees - literally, "committees of the base", or Cobas - which have emerged, they have opened up the real possibility of a united, mass response to capital's attacks. In so doing they have also opened up the possibility - if yet remote - of a genuinely communist direction being given to the movement.

However, there is no point in exaggerating the movement's political consciousness (when, as the article here makes clear, left-wing capitalist factions increasingly dominated the rank and file committees); nor is it accurate to talk simply of the tendency towards unification and generalisation of the struggle without mentioning its limitations (e.g. failure to involve private sector workers; petty refusals to unify across craft boundaries). Further, it would be a disservice to our cause if we portrayed the Cobas as "spontaneous" expressions of a "pure" working class in clear-cut opposition to trade unionism (when many of the rank and file committees came from union 'base' organisations). If we are to learn from the Italian experience we have to recognise the contradictory nature of concrete reality and provide a material explanation for the process whereby a self-organised rank and file movement - which at its height (in May) saw 60,000 school workers alone on the streets of Rome - became reduced to a rump of political elements and left trade-unionists calling on workers to join a token demonstration in defence of "the

that substituting "the right to strike" for opposition to the specific cuts which the unions had accepted was a manoeuvre to:

"reconstitute the union machine which is now largely unrecognised throughout the public services, in order to suppress the social conflict produced by the workers' struggle and get the financial laws and work contracts passed over the heads of the workforce." [Document produced by "self-organised public service workers" in Milan - including teachers, railworkers, telephone workers etc. - for the National "intercategory" Assembly which met in Rome on 2nd December.]

- could end up accepting the union calls for a "right to strike" demonstration in Rome in December?

It is questions like this which revolutionaries must answer in a more precise way than with the truism that rank and file workers remain under the sway of bourgeois ideology. The following article, translated from the December issue of *Battaglia Comunista*, does just that. It was written by a comrade who has been involved in the rank and file school movement from the start. By its nature it cannot be definitive but it clearly shows the sort of manoeuvres and tactics employed by capital's various left factions in the heart of the working class: Tactics which have to be fought and exposed by genuine revolutionaries, and fought from an organisational basis. In the words of our Italian comrades who work in the public sector, it's no good relying on the "selfconsciousness" of the movement. "Social democratic and petty-bourgeois organisations stand opposed to revolutionary class organisations ... we call on those who share these views to organise with us because we are not going to stand by watching those who want to "put themselves at the head" of the movement through political manoeuvres and factional intrigue."

As the experience of the Cobas movement shows, such intrigues only work when the movement itself is losing momentum and is reduced to a rump of political activists. This only confirms "a fundamental principle of the International Communist Left and its organisations that the revolution, if and when it is made, will be carried out by the working class and not its party, its army or anything else..." [From "How to Build Workers Unity and United Struggle", Internationalist Public Service Workers 1.12.87]

* Battaglia Comunista, alongside the CWO, is part of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party.

THE FIRST STAGE IS OVER

Milan, 9th December

On 15th November a National Meeting of Cobas workers and other rank and filers took place in Rome. It had been called for by the National Assembly of school Cobas on 1st November.

We were not the only ones who considered such an initiative to be somewhat premature. This certainly is not because we don't believe it's an urgent necessity to extend and generalise the movement but because we, like them, don't want to lose control of it. But it was clear only those "rank and filers" who completely follow the unions and their logic would be supporting such a meeting. Yet what real workers' movements exist apart from the school and railworkers' Cobas? Of which real movements can we speak outside of these struggles?

The Rome meeting of 15th November was a gathering of self-appointed Base Representatives composed of Democrazia Consiliare which represents the last bulwark of trade unionism and its anti-working

REVOLUTION AND COUNTER

2. BREST-LITOVSK 1918: WORLD REVOLUTION AND REVOLUTIONARY TACTICS

The first great test of the Russian workers government was over the question of peace with Germany. The Bolsheviks had always been at the head of opposition to the war (See our pamphlet TOWARDS PROLETARIAN OCTOBER Chapter One, available from the group address for '1). Indeed it owed its dramatic rise in popularity within the working class to precisely this factor. The Tsar and Kerensky, the Mensheviks and the SRs had all been brushed aside because they all wished to remain in the war. The question however was what kind of peace would the Bolsheviks obtain from the Germans and under what circumstances would the peace come about.

By signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk the Bolsheviks, and particularly Lenin, were denounced by the Right for selling out the Russian nation whilst the Left Communists called the peace a betrayal of the world working class. As the Brest-Litovsk issue raises many questions of revolutionary tactics it is just as alive today as it was seventy years ago. It is worth careful re-examination.

FROM REVOLUTIONARY DEFEATISM TO THE CAPITALIST WHIRLPOOL

The Bolshevik Party was the most consistent and principled upholder of the view that the defeat of one's "own" country was the aim of every revolutionary. Lenin, in particular, had worked body and soul for this against the ridicule of the ruling classes of Europe and the doubts of some Bolsheviks like Kamenev. Only in Russia did the proletariat succeed in winning the class war to put an end to the imperialist war. However this very success posed its own problems so long as the workers in the rest of Europe did not follow the Russian lead. However since 1915 the Bolsheviks had committed themselves to offering immediate peace to all nations if they took power.

Lenin spelled out the conditions under which peace would be offered and with what perspective in September 1917.

"The Soviet Government must IMMEDIATELY formulate proposals to all belligerent countries (that is simultaneously to their Governments and to the masses of workers and peasants) to negotiate a general peace on the spot on democratic terms, and to conclude an armistice at once, if even for only three months ... such a peace will... evoke such an explosion in the whole world ... for the workers revolt against the war grows with undiminished vigour"

COLLECTED WORKS (1928) Vol 21 P.259

This promise was fulfilled in the first international act of the "provisional workers and peasants government" on Nov 8, 1917. The Decree on Peace which Lenin had spent the first night of workers power drafting was really an appeal to governments and peoples to end the war. It was deliberately not couched in revolutionary terms. There was nothing in it about imperialism as the cause of war or that only a proletarian seizure of power could prevent more wars in the future. The aim was to give the capitalists no excuses for continuing the war, thus exposing them in front of their own people.

In this sense it was successful since the US President Wilson was forced to issue his famous 14 Points for "a just and democratic peace" only two months later. But whilst the capitalist windbag in the White House was mouthing sentiments about "open covenants, openly arrived at" the Bolsheviks were publishing the secret treaties that the

Russian bourgeoisie had signed with their friends in Britain and France to carve up the world. Henceforth Trotsky told the Soviet Executive

"There exists for us only one unwritten but sacred treaty of the international solidarity of the proletariat."

In fact this had been the main plank in the argument for the Bolsheviks to take the lead in overthrowing the Provisional Government in October. Lenin had argued that "the international situation gives us a series of objective grounds for believing that if we come out now, we shall have all proletarian Europe on our side". The "objective grounds" Lenin referred to was the mutiny which had occurred in the German Fleet. He would have been even more optimistic had he heard the news of the mutinies in the French and British armies. However the Allied High Command managed to suppress this at the time. What the Bolsheviks hoped to do by entering into negotiations with the Germans at their Army Headquarters at Brest-Litovsk was to buy time. With no army to resist further German advances they could only rely on the fact that the Germans were preparing to hold the Eastern Front whilst the "knock out blow" would be delivered in France. In this respect the October Revolution did not change German policy. Indeed the German desire to achieve a peace in the East which would need less troops to police it was one of the reasons why first Joffe, then Trotsky were able to spin out the negotiations for over 3 months.

If the Bolsheviks were united behind the idea of trying to keep negotiations going to await the world revolution, they were divided on the perspective to be adopted if this failed. Lenin was quite sanguine about the fact that a peace would have to be signed and on German terms. His position was no less internationalist than his opponents in the Party. As he wrote to in an open letter to American workers (published in English at the end of 1918),

"He is no socialist who does not understand that the victory over the bourgeoisie may require losses of territory and defeats. He is no Socialist who will not sacrifice his fatherland for the triumph of the social revolution."

Quoted on p.116 of J. Wheeler-Bennett "Brest-Litovsk - the Forgotten Peace"

Trotsky, on the other hand, actively thought that he could play off the imperialist powers. He told the Entente Powers exactly what Soviet Russia was doing and invited them to join in the peace talks. When the draconian nature of the German terms became clear he tried to get the Allies to come to military terms and asked them what material aid could they offer for a resumption of the war. But his requests, not surprisingly, fell on deaf ears. The French and British bourgeoisie feared the Russian workers more than they did German imperialism. After all Trotsky had already published the secret treaties revealing the bestial appetite of the Western democratic imperialisms. Thus when Kamenev was sent to Britain his diplomatic luggage and his money was seized and after a short imprisonment, and a brief talk to the Foreign Office, he was deported back to Russia.

Trotsky's perspective was no less internationalist than Lenin's. He too staked survival of the Russian proletarian revolution on the activities of the Western European workers.

"If the peoples of Europe do not arise and crush imperialism we shall be crushed - that is beyond doubt. Either the Russian revolution will raise the whirlwind of struggle in the west, or the capitalists of all countries will stifle our struggle."

(Quoted in E.H. Carr "The Bolshevik Revolution" Vol.3 p.29)

Thus

"We began peace negotiations in the hope of arousing the workmen's parties of Germany and Austria-Hungary as well as those of the Entente countries. For this reason we were obliged to delay the negotiations as long as possible to give the European workmen time to understand the main fact of the Soviet revolution itself, and particularly its peace policy."

L. Trotsky "Lenin" (London 1925) p.128

Even in the signing of the armistice with the Germans at Brest-Litovsk the Bolsheviks tried to balance the shame of negotiating with imperialism with the need to spread revolutionary propaganda. Not only did they get the Germans to agree not to transfer troops to the Western Front during the period of the armistice but also to agree to fraternisation between the two armies and to allowing revolutionary literature into German-held territory. Radek had already begun organising German and Austrian prisoners and even produced a newspaper for them (Die Fackel) which was also distributed to the troops at the Brest-Litovsk station by the Bolshevik delegation!

"PEREDYSHKA"

Trotsky was able to hold up the Germans for three weeks but on January 18th 1918 the German ultimatum was finally presented. All Polish, Lithuanian, and half of Latvian lands were to be German whilst the Ukraine was to be given its "independence". These were the offerings Trotsky took back to Petrograd. It was at this point that all the different perspectives latent within the Bolshevik Party made themselves felt.

Lenin was in no doubt that there was no option but to accept. He immediately drew up his views in his "Theses on the Question of the Immediate Conclusion of a Separate and Annexationist Peace". He still maintained that

But

"There is no doubt that the socialist revolution in Europe is bound to happen and will happen. All our hopes of the FINAL victory of socialism are founded on this conviction and on this scientific prediction. Our propaganda activity in general and the organisation of fraternisation in particular must be strengthened and developed."

"...it would be a mistake to build the tactics of the socialist government on attempts to determine whether the European, and in particular, the German socialist revolution will happen in the next half year (or some such short time) or will not happen."

(Quoted in Carr op. cit p.45)

To Lenin making peace at all costs would be the best advert for world revolution since

R REVOLUTION IN RUSSIA



THE SIGNING OF THE ARMISTICE AT BREST-LITOVSK, DECEMBER 1917
The Germans are seated on the left, the Russians on the right. Kamenev and Joffe in civilian clothes at the table.

the war-weary workers would have no better contrast than the rapaciousness of imperialism and the peace of the socialist republic. This reasoning did not find much support from the other two tendencies in the Party. Trotsky had along said he would never sign a shameful peace with Germany so he could not bring himself to sign the proposed terms. On the other hand he recognised, like Lenin that there was no possibility of serious resistance at that time. This is why he came up with his formula of neither signing the peace nor fighting the war. The majority at this time were for rejection. Lenin dubbed this group the "Muscovites" since its core was the Moscow leadership around Bukharin, Lomov and Ossinsky and the journal "Kommunist" which actually came into existence over the opposition to signing Brest-Litovsk. For the "Left Communists" as they called themselves the issue was one of principle. To sign the peace was to abandon the Western European revolution which they believed imminent, to German militarism. They rightly claimed that they were holding to Lenin's old position. They put forward the idea of a revolutionary war against Germany and even talked of retreating to Siberia whilst conducting a guerrilla war against the Germans. Although the biggest faction the left did not command an overwhelming majority and Lenin threw his support behind Trotsky's formula rather than accept the Moscow position. Trotsky was allowed to return to Brest-Litovsk to make his unilateral declaration of "No war, No peace".

The Germans dutifully followed protocol and gave a week's notice before resuming their advance. Lenin proposed an immediate offer of renewed negotiations but lost by one vote in the Central Committee. The vote was Trotsky's. He argued for waiting to see what would happen in Germany and Austria. But within twenty-four hours, when news of the German capture of Dvinsk and most of the Ukraine reached Petrograd he had abandoned his position. Now the Central Committee voted to accept the original terms offered by the Germans.

Now the Germans had upped the price of peace. In addition to the earlier terms the Russian Army had to abandon the Baltic Provinces and the whole of the Ukraine and Finland. The new even more draconian terms revived the divisions in the Bolshevik Party. Whilst Lenin repeated his earlier arguments that

"Germany is only pregnant with revolution. The second month must not be mistaken for the ninth. But here in Russia we have a healthy, lusty child. We may kill it if we start a war",

the Left Communists were renewing their call for a revolutionary war. The first issue of their journal "Kommunist" contained an article by Bukharin and Radek which stated that "No conscious revolutionary would agree to such dishonour" as the treaty and that "we should die in a fine pose, sword in hand, crying 'Peace is dishonour, war is honour!'. This kind of language sounds more like that of Don Quixote than serious revolutionaries but there was a genuine concern behind this call. The Left Communists were seriously worried that the Bolsheviks were abandoning the internationalist principles which had marked them out from every other socialist party in Europe. In the light of the further degeneration of the revolution into Stalin's "socialism in one country" it has to be seriously asked if Brest-Litovsk was the first step on the road to the abandonment of the world revolution in favour of defending Russian state capitalism.

And as Lenin was himself proposing "state capitalism" as the economic programme of the revolution pending the extension of workers powers to other areas, it would seem that there is a degree of coherence in this. However Lenin's aphorism that "facts are stubborn things" marked out his method in this debate rather than any change of principles. To him signing Brest-Litovsk was a TACTIC. The stubborn fact was that the Bolsheviks had no alternative unless they wanted German bayonets to wipe out "Red Petrograd". In addition he still expected that a German Revolution in a few months would wipe out all treaties (and in November 1918 he was to be proved right). His speech at the Seventh Party Congress on March 6th was probably the most hard-hitting of his career. He severely castigated the "fools" who talked of "dishonour" and argued that

"all that I foresaw has come to pass ... in place of the treaty offered at Brest-Litovsk we have one that is far more crushing. The blame lies with those who refused it. By this refusal we are helping German imperialism by handing over millions of tons of our resources - guns, ammunition and food ... We had to do it nevertheless to gain a breathing space .. but the KOMMUNIST makes light of the PEREDYSHKA (breathing space)." (Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett p.280)

Because there was no other outcome to the debate the Congress voted by 30 votes to 12 to accept "the humiliating peace treaty".

In the meantime Lenin's response when presented with the treaty document was

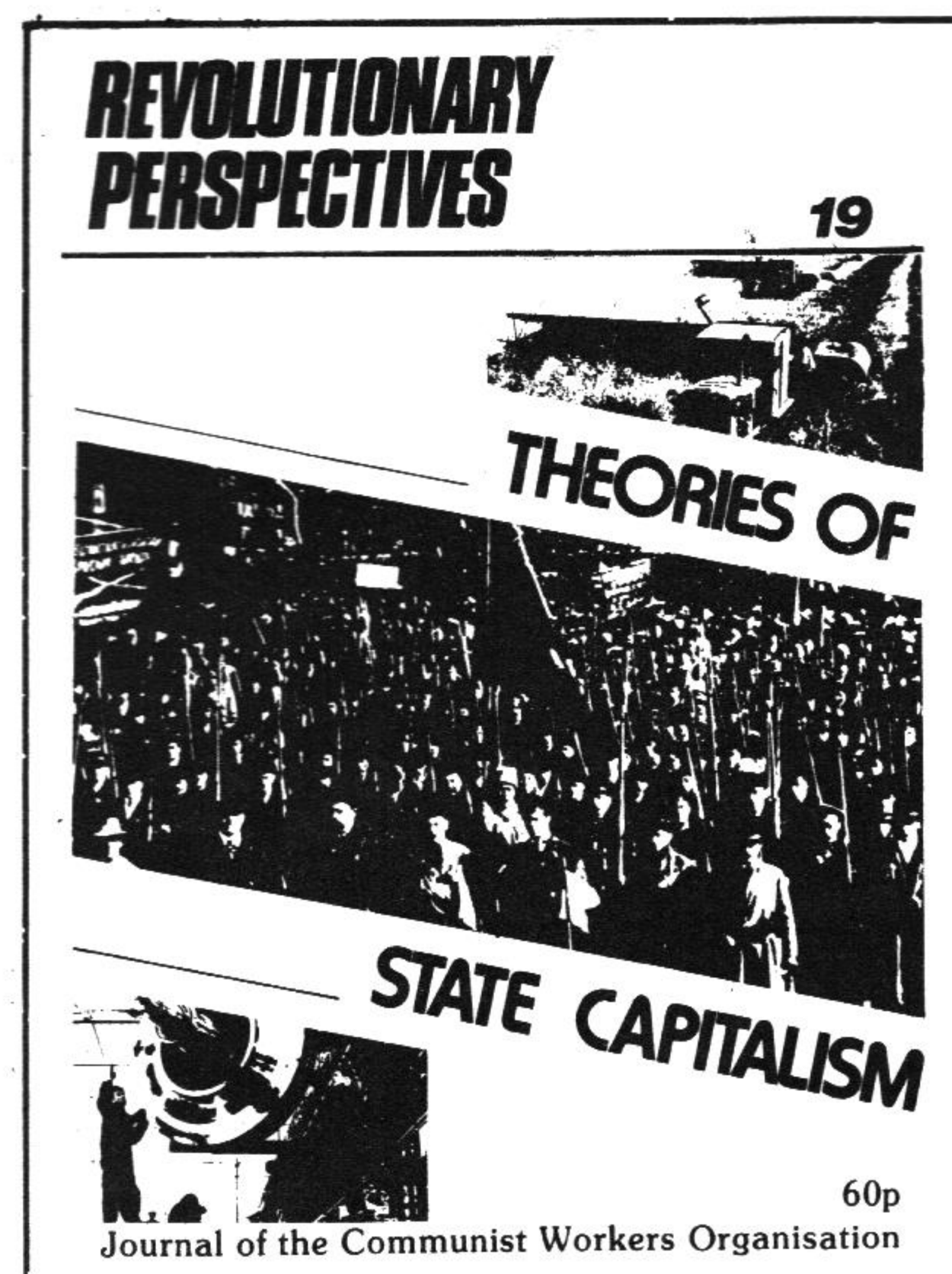
"I don't mean to read it and I don't mean to fulfil it, except in so far as I am forced"
(Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett p.276)

In response the KOMMUNIST group argued that "the conclusion of peace has a negative effect on the spiritual and psychological development of the international revolution" (in These of the Left Communists, Glasgow 1977 edition). They pointed to the fact the German and Austrian ruling classes would now have the grain lands of the Ukraine to offer bread for the workers there to support imperialism. Further the work of fraternisation and revolutionary propaganda would have to be abandoned.

These "facts" however turned out to be wrong. In the first place the Germans needed 1 million men in the Ukraine to enforce their "robber peace" (Lenin). Hoffman the German commander in the East was soon telling his superiors that they were unreliable as they had become infected with the "Bolshevist" virus. And the Ukrainian peasants failed to cough up the grain which the Germans hoped to entrain for Vienna and Berlin. As a result it was the starvation of the Austrian and German masses which led to the revolutions of October and November 1918 which brought about the end of the war. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk thus lasted only six months and so can hardly have been said to have held up the development of the world revolution which Bukharin and others feared.

As for the ending of revolutionary propaganda it was one of the terms of the Treaty that there would be an exchange of ambassadors. Joffe was sent to Berlin where he was extremely successful in directing literature towards the most advanced sections of the working class. It was thus not the Russian revolutionaries who held back on the promotion of the world revolution but, as it turned out, the European revolution which failed to save its Russian outpost.

This is however another chapter. In the meantime the signing of Brest-Litovsk did turn the imperialist war into a civil war since the Left SRs now split from the workers government and began a campaign of assassination of leading Bolsheviks. This opened up a new phase of the Russian revolution, the phase of civil war against the Whites and their backers in the Allied Governments of Britain, France, Japan and the United States.



The Russian Economy explained
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PALESTINIANS REVOLT

Continued from Front Page

one third of the Gaza Strip has been expropriated by Israel, which has established 18 settlements occupied by 2,500 people, including a luxury hotel. The settlers consume a third of Gaza's available water. Palestinians are refused permits to dig new wells and have meters on existing pumps with carefully limited consumption quotas. On the West Bank there are 70,000 more settlers to ensure that it too can one be annexed. As Dayan said in 1967 on the US NBC network when asked if Israel could allow the Arabs in the conquered territories to live and work normally, "Economically we can but I think it is not in accord with our aims in the future". What those aims are was made clear once again last year by Prime Minister Shamir who denied that Israel was "administering occupied territories". He stated flatly that Israel was exercising its rightful sovereignty over "Eretz Israel". Those pretensions have only been partially exposed and derailed by the uprisings in the occupied territories.

RISING IN GAZA

The first point to make about the risings in Gaza which began on December 9th is that they were completely spontaneous. Neither the PLO nor the small Islamic fundamentalist organisations had any part in the initial revolt. This perhaps explains why the Israelis were caught so much by surprise since Mossad (the Israeli secret service) knows what the PLO is up to all the time. The revolt was sparked off by the running down of 5 Palestinian workers by an Israeli Army lorry. But these deaths were only the spark for a rising which had been smouldering for years as the Israelis increased the humiliation and squalor in the camps. In the past strikes have not lasted long because the Palestinian workers, like the black workers in Soweto, have to cross into Israel proper in order to earn the meagre wages that keep them alive. Without such income it is difficult for them to exist.

The fact that the struggle has lasted so long this time is not just a tribute to the workers courage but also to their self-organisation. Committees were set up from the beginning of the strike to ensure adequate distribution of what supplies there were. All this was done without the co-ordination of the PLO which only began to take charge of the committees after about a week. The PLO has since been able to take greater control of the struggle by co-ordinating its followers in the Gaza Strip using radio broadcasts from Southern Lebanon.

This should be remembered by all those who insist that communists should give tactical support to nationalist movements on the grounds that only through them can we arrive at a basis for a genuinely working class struggle. The absence of any organised expression of the Palestinian bourgeoisie at the beginning of the struggle allows the possibility of new forces emerging within the ranks of the Palestinian workers which could develop into a genuinely working class leadership. Such a scenario is even more likely when we consider the nature of the leadership that the PLO and its forebears have given in the last sixty years.

THE PALESTINIAN BOURGEOISIE

After the Balfour Declaration the Zionists successfully got their first foothold in Palestine by buying up the fertile lands held by the Beirut merchants who had obtained their land as a speculation during the Ottoman Empire. But once they were bought out the Zionists managed to increase their holdings by 50% by buying from the Palestinian landed classes who, according to the German Consul in 1933,

"...in daylight were crying out against Jewish immigration and in the darkness of the nights were selling lands to the Jews."

(Quoted in DISPOSSESSED, D. Gilmour p.43)

In addition many Palestinian rulers took Jewish bribes for their newspapers. When the blow finally came in 1947 the Palestinian fellahin were left to fight the Israeli army on their own.

"They had been disgracefully deserted their (sic) leaders, most of whom were living in safety in Beirut, Cairo and Damascus." (op. cit p.63)

And in the agony of the Palestinian diaspora this story has been repeated time and again. Whilst the Palestinians have become the proletariat of the Arab world, whilst the refugees cling on to a fragile existence in the camps, "their leaders" i.e. their ruling class lives the good life in Middle Eastern and European capitals.

The Arab League created the PLO in 1964 in order to have a means of keeping the Palestinians within the bourgeois nationalist framework. By financing it (with \$300 million a year) they can ensure that Arafat has the means to keep the Palestinians from any "revolutionary excesses". In fact as we showed in COMMUNIST REVIEW 4 (still available @ £1 from the group address) this money is mainly used to control 60% of the Jordanian economy, the Arab Bank as well as insurance companies and transport firms throughout the Middle East. Whilst Palestinian workers throughout the world are forced to give up 5% of their wages to the PLO the profit rates made by the Palestinian bourgeoisie are vastly in excess of this. Military expenditure and refugee relief only come out of the PLO's petty cash. Putting profit before the misery of the Palestinian masses means that the PLO is prepared to settle for the Reagan Plan of 1986 which would have reduced "Palestine" to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with Jordan acting as policeman for the Western bloc in those areas. The Plan foundered not on PLO intransigence but on the refusal of the Israelis to abandon their longer term aim to integrate the occupied territories into Israel for good.

THE REVOLUTIONARY ROAD

The history of the last forty years has shown that the Arab bourgeoisie has no intention of alleviating the misery of the Palestinian masses. It shows too that those revolutionaries who think they can use nationalist struggles like that in the Middle East are not being "realistic" in adopting a correct tactical framework but in fact counter-revolutionary. The nationalist struggle is the best way in which the bourgeoisie can fragment the working classes of the region and tie each national section of the proletariat to each local bourgeoisie's coat-tails. And in the midst of all this the one state which no-one talks about, the one state which can alleviate the social horrors of decadent imperialism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, is all but forgotten. This is why the first pre-condition for the Palestinians to receive justice is organisational autonomy from bourgeois forces like the PLO (which supports Western imperialism) or the NSF (of Habash, Musa, Nidal etc, who support Soviet imperialism). The formation of a communist reference point amongst the Palestinians is the essential first step in this process. Only once this is done will it be possible to unite the workers of the region (and this would include those Israeli workers who reject their own bourgeoisie) around an internationalist revolutionary programme. This in turn could become the focus to draw the exploited millions who are still subject to nationalist, religious or democratic ideology away from domination by their "own" bourgeoisie. As the agony of the Palestinians drags on this is increasingly becoming the realistic option.



COMMUNIST REVIEW No 6

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Central Organ of the
International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

No 6

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NURSES & THE NHS

Continued from Front Page

Never before have the health workers had so much support from "the public" because "the public" includes the whole working class which, along with the nurses is being attacked daily by capital and its economic crisis.

WORKERS IGNORE UNIONS

But while capital knows no morality and makes no distinction as to which set of workers it attacks, the working class remains divided by trade union boundaries and is continually disarmed by union deals with the bosses. It is not only health workers who have had enough. Since we last went to press postal workers have been on strike only to find the strike called off by a union that didn't want to disrupt the Christmas post. In the week of the nurses' strike alone pit safety deputies have struck to show their opposition to less safe working practices approved by the Coal Board; striking ferrymen have been told their strike is off by cowardly union officials frightened for their 'assets' and afraid to "flout the authority of the law". This when hundreds of jobs are at stake, not to mention the safety of passengers and crew. At the time of writing, however, 6,000 of the 7,500 ferrymen have shown what they think of the union and are continuing the strike. Finally, in the same week, AEU negotiator for Ford workers, Jimmy Airlie, called off an all-out strike at the last minute when he announced a "satisfactory" 3 year settlement - only to find that the union had "misjudged the mood of the workforce" who rejected the deal and are threatening to strike anyway. In



Solidarity - the one way forward

10 years Ford's unions have negotiated away 6,000 jobs and overseen the higher levels of exploitation Ford has demanded to keep up with its competitors. Now Airlie complains that the company is "rushing" its plans for even more "flexibility". But the workers are saying "enough".

The continual cuts, heavier workloads, declining living standards which all workers are experiencing is the basis for a common fight back. Over and over again experience shows that isolated sections cannot win alone. Over and over again the unions prove they are against a real fight. They are frightened of the prospect of workers from all sections of the economy joining together to fight. They are frightened of losing their positions of control over the workforce. They are scared of going outside the law. In short, they are frightened of the class struggle.

What's needed now is grassroots workers to take the struggle into their own hands. Italian public service workers have shown how to begin to fight OUTSIDE and AGAINST the unions. Workers can elect their own struggle committees from workplace meetings to co-ordinate with those from other sectors. How much more powerful would a single struggle of hospital workers, postal workers, mineworkers, seamen, car workers, of ALL workers be? - Especially when it was organised by the workers themselves. The situation demands such a fight and the signs are that the mood of the masses is changing. They should realise what they are capable of.

C.W.O. February, 1988

Continued from Page 3 ITALIAN TEACHERS

class policies in the very heart of the working class. Officially politics were absent from them. In reality the Trotskyists of LCR (Lega Comunista Rivoluzionaria), supporters of Democrazia Proletaria and their corresponding union appendages were in control.

We must quickly make it clear that we are not objecting to 'politicisation' as such but to what it means and implies. The Meeting had been organised "in defence of the right to strike". Now, despite the fact that various speeches clearly affirmed that "there is only one way to defend the right to strike: by striking!", in practice it was forbidden for speakers to mention the one thing which could unify the workers in struggle. It is obvious that a unified workers' struggle is built on the basis of their initial starting point (their concrete grievances). In essence the reason for the self-mobilisation of both school and rail workers independently of the unions lies in the direct attacks on them by the state and the trade unions' contracts. Aside from "the specificity of sectional interests" there exists a single line of attack which stems from the same legislative and negotiating framework. All the other branches of the public services "represented" there had been equally hit and had the same reason to struggle. Thus, it is also obvious that we must ask ourselves why the "technical meeting" had established beforehand that delegates would not be permitted to speak of this. We will immediately exclude the stupidity of the participants: no matter how little esteem we have for the above-mentioned organisations, we know they aren't stupid. On the contrary, the calculation was subtle: speak of unity and build a fictitious unity on neutral ground which is so general that it becomes abstract, in order to avoid extending those fronts of struggle which have arisen outside of and against the unions. What else could this lead to but a document of "synthesis", or rather of cowardly compromise which goes no further than defence of the right to strike by proposing the possibility of a national demonstration in Rome? What else but cowardly compromise can follow from the language and phraseology of the document?

In fact it speaks of the "civil code of the workers' struggle" almost as if workers have to justify their fight to themselves when they are being brutally attacked by bosses and state alike. It speaks of the "anti-popular spirit" of the Financial Law, letting it be implied that something else is possible from this state, perhaps a popular financial law.

The content is in line with the phraseology: the basic assumption is that another government would be able to do something else (perhaps a Democrazia Popolare/Communist Party Government?) In fact it doesn't attack the policies of the capitalist state as such - which in Italy is under the control of five parties (of the Centre-Left) who are doing the same things as an openly reactionary government like that of Mrs. Thatcher. On the other hand, the same document makes no appeal for rank and file unity, for the necessity of a unified response to capital's violent attacks in the fields of work contracts and economic legislation - not even on the basis of the self-professed necessity "to reject public spending cuts and guarantee true consumer rights".

From a basis like this it's very difficult for a genuine mass movement to develop. A national demonstration held outside of a strongly mobilised workforce has scarcely any possibility of succeeding. This is even more true when those who call it aren't delegates of a real "rank and file" process (assemblies, strong rank and file committees) but are there by union authorisation or vote (it doesn't matter how the agreement was reached) rather than delegates of a living process.

Even this is now so obvious that explanations of similar "mistakes" can be found elsewhere. For instance, the document widely distributed by our internationalist

group of Public Service workers in various assemblies of the movement (school or inter-category in different cities) states:

"The general aim is to repeat, or to get the Cobas movement to repeat, the failed experience of the Self-appointed Committees (Autoconvocati). This is not in order to find a way of putting forward the independent interests of the workers, but rather a political legitimisation of those groups who are in the unions, the union leftwingers who - like DP or LCR - still hold to a hierarchical, essentially social-democratic conception of the class struggle and its outcome. From this standpoint it is easy to predict the steps in the process which the 'motion' in Rome prefigures:

- announcement of a "huge demonstration in Rome" against regulation of the right to strike which, in this period, would certainly not attract even the 60,000 that the demonstration of school Cobas alone did in May;
- defeat of the movement with the mass of workers still waiting to see what happens and a corresponding retreat in the tendency towards rank and file unification (at least in the short term) which emanated from the proletarian masses themselves;
- the political direction of the movement will then be completely within the terms of the unions and social democracy (using the them of rank and file democracy, thus strengthening Democrazia Consiliare and their supporters inside the unions." [From "How to Build Workers' Unity..." quoted in the Introduction].

An "inter-category" provincial assembly of 3rd December confirmed what we had been saying. First of all, there is the way it was called. The idea was first launched by the rank and file representations during a debate in a social centre. This was taken up and agreed on by the provincial assembly of the school Cobas but was deliberately twisted by Democrazia Consiliare whose agreement was a manoeuvre to "be at the head".

Thus, from beginning to end the meeting operated on the ground of DC, despite the powerful speeches against this by various delegates of the school Cobas who quite rightly disassociated themselves from this leadership. Finally, with hardly anyone left, the motion for 12th December demonstration in Rome was "voted" on while the Cobas didn't vote.

In Padua on the same day, a similar meeting - though not dominated by DC - voted for the same thing. At this point it is appropriate to point out that this meeting contradicted previous ones which had clearly affirmed that the basis for unifying across job categories lies in the concrete reasons for the struggle and the rank and file organisations.

However, on 6th-12th December the national assembly of School Cobas was held. The original agenda had been changed so that the "question of the 12th" was at the top. The bourgeois press prematurely trumpeted that the movement was divided into 'hawks' and 'doves' over the issue. The doves were the "Gigliottists" - that is the most corporatist, openly reactionary and generally pro-PCI. The 'hawks' were those who had already decided on a demonstration on the basis of the arguments we have already condemned.

The 'hawks' won but they were also soon to suffer a blow which, if it is an exaggeration to call 'historic', certainly has a sequel.

A vote of hands by all the provincial delegates approved an 'amendment' to all the other motions put forward by the School Cobas. It demanded the exclusion of the (more or less leftwing) trade union component from the Base Committees (Cobas) of the schools. Members of bodies inside the unions would be able to take part in the movement and the struggle but only as workers, definitely not as proponents of these "authorities".

On December 12th Democrazia Consiliare ought not to be there. If it is there,

along with its banners (which it is logical to expect, in view of the real relation of forces apart from one particular vote) that will signal the end of the first phase of the movement. It will conclude a period in which the "political ranks" have been able to play a part. The next phase will only be able to begin when the genuine struggle of the rank and file revives. Today this is only a matter of speculation, or rather a question of possibility. It is that possibility for which we are working.

Battaglia Comunista

POLITICAL PLATFORM of the INTERNATIONALIST COMMUNIST PARTY

Vth Congress
Milan - 1982

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* Trade unions and shop stewards are the wage brokers for the capitalist system and cannot defend the interests of the working class

* The struggle for communism cannot be carried out through Parliament, but must be brought about through workers' councils with recallable delegates

* The working class can only come to power through the creation of its own political party - the international communist party

* The capitalist system is in crisis and irretrievable decline. It can only offer inflation and unemployment and it cannot be reformed. The only choice for the future is war or revolution: BARBARISM OR COMMUNISM!

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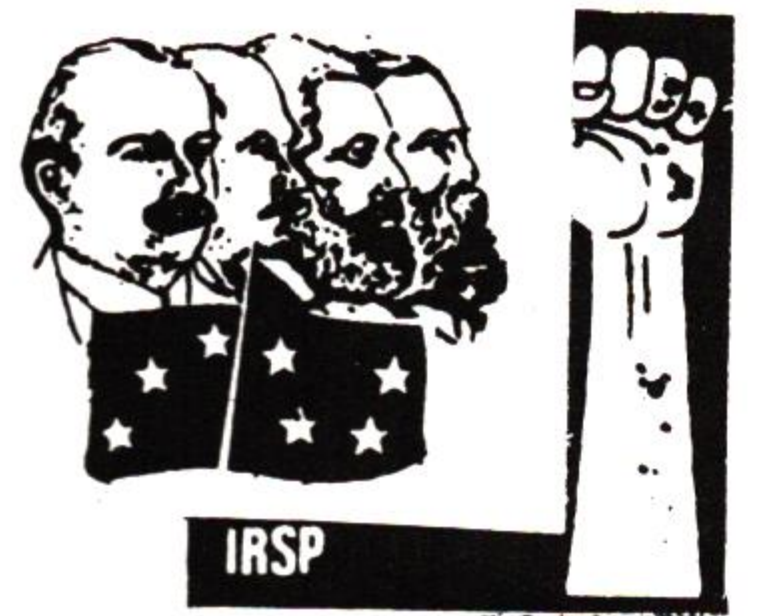
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WORKERS VOICE

IRSP: FROM GREEN LIES TO RED MYTH



All factions of bourgeois political life nostalgically remind us that it is now twenty years since the civil rights agitation which is said to mark the beginning of the present "troubles" in Ulster. The state, liberals and republicans are all to a greater or lesser extent using the anniversary to make propaganda for their particular solutions to the violence. The republicans especially, never slow to remind us of the sacrifices of their martyrs, have reviewed the last two decades in the most positive light, picturing themselves as the head of a population which will not be pacified until victory is won.

In our various articles on Ireland the CWO too has analysed the progress of republicanism, although our conclusions have been very different. (See for example "Sinn Féin: Socialist or Capitalist?" in **WV** #26 and "INLA Feud" in **WV** #34 - both available from the group address.) Since at least the mid-Seventies all strands of republicanism have faced the crisis of not being able to present a creditable solution to the problems facing the working class in general, and Catholic workers in particular. It has become evident that their initial panacea - a quick military victory to remove the British and destroy the Orange State - is no longer on the cards.

To replace the old-style militarist leaders new leftist elements have risen to prominence among the many strands of the movement, attempting to relate to "social questions", which they rightly assume are of much greater direct relevance to workers North and South who have faced ruling class austerity attacks equal to anywhere in Europe. The Workers' Party and Provisional Sinn Féin are the two best known examples of this development, the latter always relating its reformist agitation to the IRA's military campaign to erode British Government will to remain in Ireland.

In the context of this general leftward drift of crisis ridden republicanism the re-emergence of the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) in the wake of their bloody feud must be seen as the culmination of the process, the most remarkable confirmation to date of the communist analysis that in the modern epoch national liberation ideology is bankrupt. Through their relaunched paper **Starry Plough** the IRSP seem to be attempting to exorcise the spectre of lingering bourgeois nationalism: "It is time to climb to a new level by setting about the

construction of a genuine revolutionary socialist movement - a movement which firmly recognises the primacy of class politics."

NEW DIRECTION

To their credit the IRSP do not flinch at a serious analysis of their past, and in fact conclude with a similar analysis to that we made of them in **Workers Voice** #34. They admit that the organisation was not formed by communists but by left republicans, trade unionists, etc., whose political weakness was compounded by the fact that repression from both the state and the Official IRA helped the militarist approach to dominate politics, the group becoming a mouthpiece for the INLA and virtually indistinguishable from other strands of republicanism.

Now, it is claimed, with the militarist and criminal elements eradicated by the feud, the Party is to become revitalised, and formally, "embrace the scientific socialism of Marx and Engels in order to analyse and thus formulate a political programme for the Irish revolution." Initially the main activity of the re-emerged IRSP will be the organisation of debate on perspectives, culminating in the building of a "communist party".

Again, when they come to justify their existence vis-à-vis the already existing leftist "anti-imperialist" party, Sinn Féin, the IRSP seem, superficially, to share the analysis of the CWO. They expose the Sinn Féin leadership as petty-bourgeois, which while paying lip service to IRA myths of a military solution indulges in the most crass reformism within the Northern Ireland state. Modern Sinn Féin is compared to the republican movement of the Independence War period, with its infamous theme of "Labour must wait" - in other words class struggle is a distraction. Both these criticisms are quite valid, as is the exposé of Sinn Féin's ultimate aim, a united Irish capitalism, with the state fundamentally unaltered, and Irish troops providing the iron fist to guarantee exploitation rather than British.

So, as stated in the introduction, the leftism of the IRSP is a few steps up the ladder of sophistication from that of Sinn Féin, the most obvious consequence of which is that its propaganda is a little less ambiguous. The issue of violence, for instance, has already been briefly touched on. The IRSP will maintain a military wing (INLA) but claim that henceforth it will be subject to stricter political control - in contrast to Sinn Féin who have notorious difficulty in controlling elements in the IRA who favour more overt militarism (hence the power struggles of recent years). Similarly Sinn Féin have always been notable for their ambiguous position on the Roman Catholic Church and "moral" questions such as abortion and divorce, knowing where their money and support come from and exercising "realpolitik". By contrast, for the IRSP, "There should also be no illusions that the Catholic Church is neutral in political matters. It is heavily invested in the world capitalist system and performs a reactionary role on a worldwide basis." (**Starry Plough** #1)

SO FAR, SO GOOD...?

It is apparent that if communists were in the game of choosing second best, then the IRSP marks an improvement on Sinn Féin, and indeed their exposure of the older group is often quite ruthless and incisive. If we take them at their word, they seem to have taken a significant step away from outright bourgeois republican ideology, making perhaps a much cleaner break on a clearer programme than was the case at their formation in 1974. However it is not our job to applaud this but to be in turn ruthless in our exposure of this group which remains in the capitalist camp, though not because of its background as an apologist for a republican murder gang. No,

it is the bourgeois nature of the new "communist" politics themselves which condemn the Party to objectively share the same side of the class fence to those they criticise - to be another obstacle to working class liberation by peddling myths which distract from the class struggle.

Due to space we can deal with only a few examples of the "class politics" of the IRSP, the importance of which has galvanised their group into its relaunch - so important that one has to search amongst numerous lengthy texts on the Irish national question in their publications to find clues to their positions on other matters! When the clues are pieced together it is discovered that although the "communist" positions may be new to the IRSP, to the working class all that is being offered is simply another brand of stale leftism - the only novelty is that these state capitalists have guns!

When dealing with the class struggle they use the age-old leftist ploy of denouncing the union leadership for betraying "trade union principals" - there is no advice to the workers to break the union stranglehold per se, and take control of struggles to spread them beyond boundaries of craft and locality. Similarly on international questions the IRSP certainly fall within the scope of tried and trusted leftist mystification. If not orthodox Stalinists, they emphasise that it is Western imperialism which threatens the oppressed of the world, and uncritically sympathise with the likes of the Sandinistas as they struggle against the US and their own workers in their attempts to make state capitalism a success.

FIGHTING IMPERIALISM

It must be said that these errors are dwarfed by the central mystification which the IRSP propagates - that the present struggle in Northern Ireland is a fight against imperialism. In fairness this belief is not just a hangover from republican lineage, it is shared by most leftist groups throughout the British Isles.

The IRSP seem to understand nothing of the Marxist notion of imperialism, and indeed debase the term by talking of a military campaign in the North to help smash the grip of British imperialism. Any Marxist analysis of the development of imperialism since 1945 demonstrates that both Britain and Eire have for a long time been under the domination of US capital which exercises hegemony over the Western economic and military bloc as a whole. To suggest that a united Ireland, however radical, could ever act truly independently outside this bloc is utopian, and to suggest that the key to securing it is the removal of the British from Ulster is even more crass. Presently Britain is Western imperialism's policeman in Northern Ireland, but it would leave tomorrow and deploy its troops and finance somewhere more useful if it could be ensured of stability.

Altogether the extremely threadbare nature of the "Marxism" of the IRSP demonstrates more than just a failure of the intellectual capacities of their membership. It demonstrates that "socialist" credentials have been tacked on to national liberation ideology to create a dangerous hybrid for the working class, and one which genuine socialists will have to combat as long as the IRSP continues to peddle its myths as an alternative to a unified class struggle and internationalist revolution.

For contact with the Communist Workers' Organisation in Ireland write as follows without mentioning the name: **P.O. Box 117, Head Post Office, Tomb Street, Belfast BT1 1AA.**

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