

WORKERS VOICE

COMMUNIST
WORKERS
ORGANISATION

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SOLIDARITY STRIKES NOT SPEECHES

During the first week in February a million workers were on strike. Some, like the Manchester teachers or the Vauxhall car workers struck for only one shift or a few hours. But significantly their strikes were in solidarity with the hospital workers. Others, like the ferry workers and the Ford workers were in struggle over issues connected with the industries they worked in. No wonder the ruling class were showing signs of unease. An unease reflected in the capitalist press which was comparing the situation to that of the "winter of discontent" of 1979.

This level of militancy did not last even until the end of the month. The Ford workers were content to return after a week having achieved a contract which would not last for the three years the management wanted. The strikes in support of the NHS dwindled once the TUC and the health unions took over the campaign. As so often in the past the initiative shown by the workers themselves was dissipated in "days of action" spread around the country.

Instead of solidarity strikes we got marches to pre-arranged venues to listen to the usual windbags like Norman Willis prattling on about injustice. But the whole fiasco of these stage-managed affairs cannot be put down to stupidity. Behind the apparent incompetence of the "Labour Movement" lies a more serious purpose. The aim is to defuse workers anger and keep it within the bounds of "responsible trades unionism" i.e. to prevent the development of a struggle which would break the laws against striking in solidarity with other workers.

THE SEAFARERS SUNK BY THE NUS

The most dramatic example of the role which the unions play in demobilising the workers came in the solidarity action in defence of the workers facing the sack by the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company (a subsidiary of P&O). Whilst the capitalist courts not surprisingly declared the strikes illegal the capitalist union leader (and Labour Party Executive member) Sam Mcluskay was reneging on his promise to "go to jail" rather than submit to the courts. The ferry workers were told to go back to work and most of them reluctantly obeyed. It is a sign of the times that whilst many are prepared to struggle they are looking for leadership and organisation which they cannot get from the unions today. In fact it is the union structures which have benefitted most from the supposed anti-union Tory legislation. As a recent (and anti-worker) book from the Open University has shown employers are using injunctions to stop wildcat strikes led by the workers themselves;

"They used the threat of legal penalties to demoralise strikers and pickets into handing over control of the dispute (he means struggle - CWO) to the senior ranks of the union"
(John MacInnes THATCHERISM AT WORK)

In the case of the ferryworkers the union leadership did the rest for the bosses.

However that has not ended either the resistance of the ferryworkers or the attacks of the bosses. 50 Belfast ferryworkers were sacked for their part in the solidarity action in February and their comrades occupied a ferry in Belfast. Other workers in Belfast have taken solidarity action with them and the ferries were blacked by other



Hyde Park March 19th: Nurses anger at union leaders forces Willis and Co. to abandon the platform.

transport workers. The killings at Milltown Cemetery and on the Andersonstown Road have been very useful for the RUC since it has allowed them to storm the ferries and force the occupation to end at gunpoint with the minimum of press coverage.

At other P&O terminals the struggle has continued. The firm that brought you the Zeebrugge disaster recorded a profits leap of 100 millions to 270 million pounds a year this year. This represents a great success for the policy of not shutting ferry doors. Now P&O want to get the workers to accept new conditions which will mean even greater dangers for ferry users since 400 jobs are to go as a sacrificial offering to the god of profit. P&O aren't really interested in just losing those 400 jobs. They also want to reduce the wages and worsen the conditions of those who remain. Hence their intransigence in sacking the 2300 workers at Dover. With the masters of their ships already having signed new contracts there will be nothing to stop P&O bringing in labour from the capitalist periphery to work for starvation wages.

In this sense the P&O struggle is similar to all the other fights of the working class in the face of the capitalist crisis. The only difference is that the capitalists have re-structured in other industries by taking their capital to places where they can exploit workers with very low standards of

living. In the case of the ocean-going shipping industry they have already brought in Filipino, Pakistani etc labour. Now they aim to extend it to the ferries.

In February the ferry workers showed how angry they were and how ready they were to make solidarity action bite. But now the NUS, having ordered the workers back is holding a ballot on another national strike which they will control. As Mcluskay now says they "will

THE WORKERS HAVE NO COUNTRY!

UNITE THE STRIKES!

Today P&O workers are on strike as the strike of the SNCF workers on the French ferries continues. They have the same enemy, the same struggle but different unions. Against the international capitalist monopolies we must counterpose the international solidarity of the working class.

not step outside the law". In other words the union is going to control the strike which will just be a ritual to assist the NUS in negotiating away jobs.

It is clear from events in February that when workers DO GO OUTSIDE THE LAW they have more chance of victory since a solid action which generalises itself cannot be stopped by mere injunctions. Nobody prosecuted those who struck in support of the NHS workers since this would have been impossible as well as politically inept.

THE STRIKES GO ON

Since the middle of March the unions campaign of demobilisation has succeeded. There are few solidarity actions on behalf of the NHS workers. Within the NHS itself the unions have been able to exert even greater control than they did in 1982 (to the extent of fracturing action so that strikes remain local and therefore insignificant). And yet the level of class anger is still rising. Sometimes the press hides the extent of the resistance (they might print 2 lines on a postal workers strike in London but won't tell anyone that there is also one in the North West at the same time (as happened at the end of March). At other times the choice is a stark one - either an all-out struggle with little chance of support from other sectors, support which is vital to win any strike, or, to simply accept the carve-up of the bosses (aided and abetted by the union negotiators as at Land Rover). With such stakes to play for it is not surprising that workers resistance often begins militantly but is not sustained. We are still paying the price for the isolation and defeat of the miners.

Slowly however the consciousness is being generalised that a unified struggle is the only struggle. If the NHS struggles can break out of the union strait-jacket and get a wide degree of solidarity action they will contribute enormously to the working class recovering its confidence in its capacity to struggle.

CLAUSE 29: PREPARING THE POGROMS?

Attacks on gay rights in Clause 29 of the Local Government Bill, denunciations of "the condom culture", and more religious education in the school curriculum adds up to new "moral crusade" on the part of the ruling class.

This moral crusade has little to do with the censuring of individual behaviour. It has everything to do with reinforcing the ruling class's ideological hold over society. Laws reducing the limit on the time of pregnancy have got nothing to do with care for the unborn child but everything to do with reviving the bourgeois family (and if you are rich you can afford both a high moral stance and the high fees of a Harley St consultant). It is in this context that we should see the present campaign against gays which has been orchestrated in the corridors of Whitehall and gleefully taken up by the most depraved press in human history.

Prejudice against homosexuals is, to put it mildly, hardly new in capitalist society. In Britain until almost the end of the Sixties to admit to being homosexual was to invite prosecution. However what has been happening in the last few months not only threatens to overturn the old laws guaranteeing civil rights for gays but threatens them with legalised violence.

When a newspaper read by 5 million people can produce a cartoon showing gays hanging from lamp-posts then we are into a new era. "Puffs", "poofs" "queers" are now regular headline terms of abuse. Queer-bashing is now officially OK and to the right-wing thugs of the National Front etc the message is clear - assaulting gays will go unpunished.

It is ironic that a couple of Jewish peers have used the House of Lords as a forum to join in the campaign. One of them even justified the persecution on the grounds that leading Nazis were homosexuals! Apart from the total irrelevance of this fact the irony lies in the close analogy that can be made between the situation of the homosexual in Britain in 1988 and that of the Jew in Germany in 1933.

This is not a fanciful comparison. The Nazi propaganda machine (in particular "Der Sturmer") was pouring out a torrent of abuse

against Jews. Individual Jews faced assaults at the hands of anti-semites but there was no indication at that point of the dreadful



It is time to write on our banners "Stop violence against ALL workers".

horrors to come. It was to take eight years and a world war before the period of systematic genocide began. Today in Britain the first stages in whipping up a popular hatred of gays has been undertaken. First the AIDS hysteria blamed the gays, then came the massive increase in assaults as well as official persecution when a gay schoolteacher in Bradford was sacked for honestly answering pupils who asked him if he was homosexual. Who is to say where the present campaign will end...?

Why should this bother communists? After all gays are not naturally socialists - capitalist society tends to thrust them towards individual solutions to their victimisation. Nor are we interested in recruiting the oppressed simply as the oppressed (in the way that the Socialist Workers Party or the Labour Party (which, remember controls Bradford) try to do). No, our opposition to the new campaign lies in its real aim of keeping society as a whole firmly under the control of the reigning capitalist ideology. Using all the powerful weapons it has under its control to form and manipulate 'public opinion', the ruling class is creating an atmosphere where anyone who doesn't conform to the establishment 'norm' is to be regarded with utmost suspicion. There is nothing new in this technique. Throughout history rulers have tried to divert attention from internal crises facing their own regimes by whipping up popular hatred against a minority scapegoat. It is a sign of the depth of the real social divisions which have sharpened with the development of capital's crisis that in 1988 the ruling class is resorting to such techniques.

From Left and Right alike the working class is told that the issue is not one of a desperate ruling class ruthlessly clinging on to power, still less the need for an independent party for the working class as a whole. Forget about the class struggle and instead turn your anger against harmless 'minorities' or forget about the class struggle and turn to the defence of individual liberties. In any case, forget about the class struggle ...

Capitalism doesn't create all the divisions of religion, race, gender, or sexual proclivity etc but it knows how to use them to keep workers fighting each other and not the system that exploits them. No better example than this is in Northern Ireland which generally experiences less strikes for economic aims and has the highest levels of unemployment and the lowest wages in the UK. Today the figure of fear and hatred is the homosexual, tomorrow it will once again be the blacks, the Catholics or other past

bogeys.

In Tsarist Russia at the beginning of this century the right wing Black Hundreds with official support from the police (and with members of the Royal Family as its highest officers) began by carrying out pogroms against the Jews to the general indifference of the rest of the population. But as the working class grew in size and class-consciousness these "gentlemen" turned their attention on the socialists and workers who went on strike. However they bit off more than they could chew and by 1917 it was they who were forced to cower in hiding as the workers took over the State and made Russia a safer place for all minorities until Stalin demonstrated the capitalist counter-revolution by invoking the very same Great Russian chauvinism as the Tsars.

For us in Britain today the present campaign against gays is only the thin end of a more general wedge against all oppressed minorities and that includes communists. Repression is on the rise everywhere and we in Britain should not underestimate the power of a state which can shoot unarmed people in cold-blood without even being embarrassed by its own professions of freedom. However we cannot fight the new pogroms by peacefully demonstrating with famous actors or writers. The defence of the working class lies in its unity of action and in its capacity to paralyse the state's increasing power. The present arrogance of the capitalist state in the form of the Thatcher Government will not be stopped by petitions to Parliament. The whole history of the last nine years proves that reform of capitalism is impossible. The only real defence against further repression is to create a society without a state power in the hands of the enemy class in which "the free development of each is a condition for the free development of all". But for this we will need a revolution. This can only come about if all those who claim to recognise this but opt for "realism" today in the form of supporting the campaigns of the left-wing of the ruling class (the Labour Party and the trade union structure) recognise that the only realism is a long-term one. Our primary task remains the same - to build, within the working class, an internationalist party which will be capable in the future of playing the leading role in the working class revolution.

ULSTER

continued from back page

The movement against repression based on historic-religious background reflects the real material conditions of the Catholic workers, as much as a strike movement does in other situations. And like the reformist economic objectives of most strikes, communists ignore the content of mass social movements at their peril, for in both cases not only will the direction of the struggles take a path acceptable to capitalism in our absence (whether by union or petty-bourgeois control), but we will miss the opportunity to link today's reformist struggles with the objective need to overthrow the social system itself.

The state in Northern Ireland in its own interests is offering a few crumbs of its very inferior brand of freedom, their concept of which ignores the majority of peoples position as economic slaves. Communists are the firmest advocates of basic bourgeois-democratic freedoms when their absence obstructs united class action, while being the fiercest enemies of the capitalist class, whose domination of society ensures that genuine liberty is denied to us without a social revolution. In this case we are the most consistent opponents of divisive sectarian ideology in Ulster, and the only champions of a unified class struggle for real freedom.



THE NEW ARMENIAN MASSACRES

THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN THE USSR

The massacre of 31 people in the city of Sumgait in Azerbaijan has come as a cruel shock to those who argued that the national question had been "solved" in the USSR. Those killed were largely Armenians, their assailants Azerbaijanis. The pogrom followed the eruption of huge demonstrations in Erevan, the capital of Soviet Armenia. These demanded the return of the region of Nagorno-Karabakh from neighbouring Azerbaijan (which gained the territory in 1923) and followed agitation in the disputed region itself for union with Armenia. Behind the nationalist and religious issues (Armenia in Christian, Azerbaijan Moslem) lie important problems for the Soviet bureaucracy on the one hand, and the working class on the other.

GLASNOST AND THE NATIONALITIES

It is often forgotten that the USSR is a multi-national state, with well in excess of 100 different national groupings. Some (such as the Siberian or Central Asian tribes) were never "nations" or even separate states till the Russian Empire arrived in the nineteenth century. Others were ancient nationalities which had enjoyed sporadic statehood (e.g. Lithuania), yet others were states and nations of long antiquity absorbed by first Turkish or Persian, and then Russian expansion. Such were the Caucasian Republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The nationalities thus occupy the fringes of the USSR today, with the core heartland being the territory of the 50% of the population who are Russians proper. In addition to the Russians are the other Slav groupings, the 20% White Russians and Ukrainians whose nationalism is very attenuated. This leaves about 30% of the total population consisting of real national minorities.

It is impossible to develop here our analysis and critique of the Bolsheviks' nationalities policy and its subsequent evolution under Stalin. Suffice it to say, that while conceding in theory the right of any nationality to secede from the USSR (a right that would never be granted in practice), the USSR is a federal state, with a large degree of devolution of power and control to the 15 local "Soviet Republics", and a very high degree of cultural autonomy (language, religion, customs etc) appertaining thereto. Against this is the requirement of all nationalities to learn Russian, and a disproportionate number of Russians in positions of power throughout the USSR.

The establishment of independent states in Finland and the Baltic (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) after 1917 had less to do with the local population exercising the right of national self-determination, than the machinations of German imperialism and the Peace of Brest Litovsk. The Bolsheviks themselves made an end to the farce of the government of the German puppet in the Ukraine and Stalin was overseer of the crushing of the counter-revolutionary Menshevik regime in Georgia which the Entente hoped to use as a base for foreign intervention. In World War II there was some initial support for the German invaders from discontented national petty-bourgeois elements especially in the Ukraine and in the Baltic, but Nazi racial barbarity drove most back into the arms of Stalin, except for the outright fascist elements.

The practise of "glasnost" or openness and perestroika is a popular card to play with the Russian and other Slav masses in the USSR, since Gorbachev attacks the corruptions of bureaucracy in an attempt to deflect attention from his own programme of austerity. The sectors of the Soviet establishment threatened by glasnost in Russia, the Ukraine and White Russia cannot appeal to the masses to maintain the status quo since the masses see the bureaucracy as the source of their problems. In the border Republics, however, the situation is different. Here we often have corrupt local bureaucracies, ruling mafia-style, and favouring their own kind - a development

known as "tribalism" to Gorbachev's allies. Here the bureaucracy can react to the threat of losing their privileges by playing the nationalist card - denouncing Great Russian Chauvinism. This is clearly what lay behind the riots in the capital of Kazakhstan, Alma Ata, last year when two people were killed in rioting against the sacking of a local, native party boss. The local party elite connived at the rioting, hoping it would stay Gorbachev's hand; instead he used it as the opportunity to purge thoroughly the Kazakh leadership of his opponents. In the present situation Gorbachev's problems are much more serious.

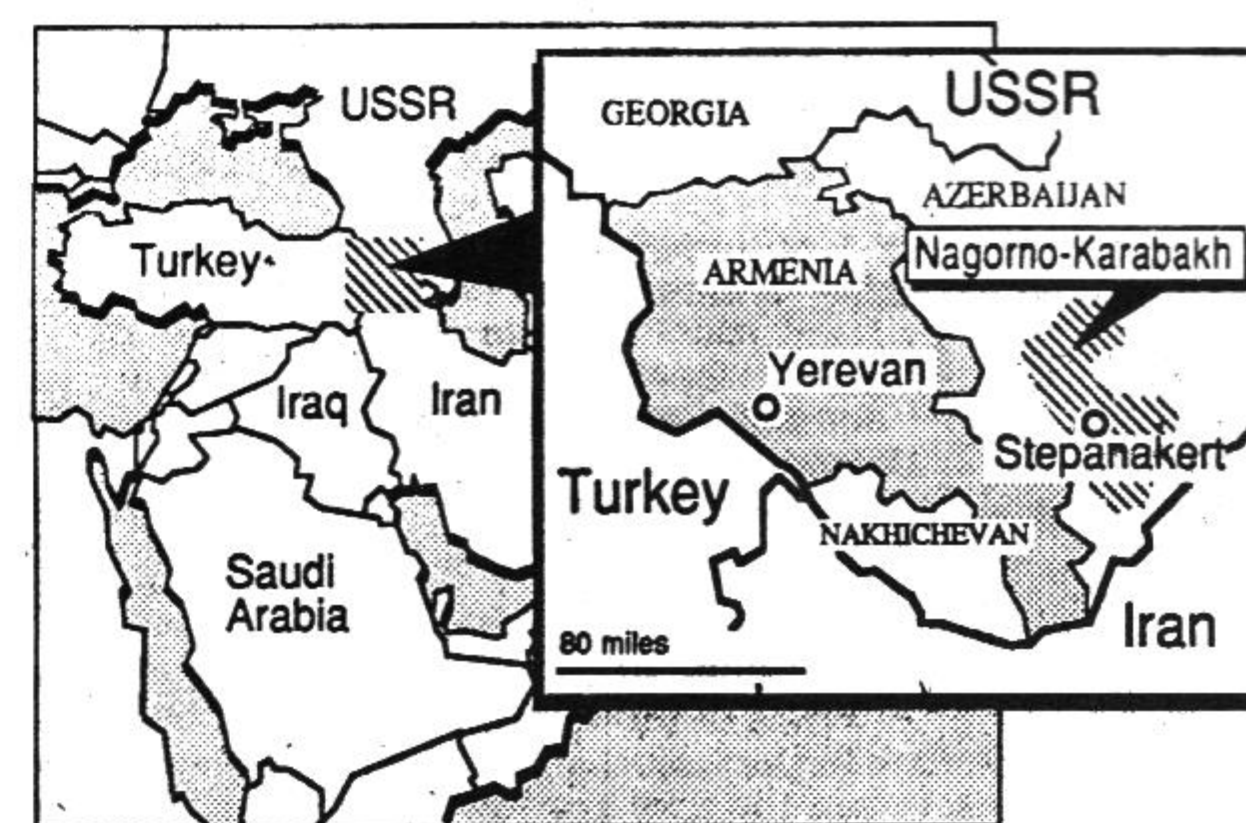
THE ARMENIAN QUESTION

The recent problems in Armenia stemmed from criticism and a threatened purge of the Armenian party apparatus, allegedly for blocking "perestroika". After a vote in the Soviet of the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region for union with Armenia, followed by huge demonstrations in Erevan, which the authorities made every attempt to encourage, the Armenian Soviet and Party declared its support for territorial change. In Azerbaijan the authorities, although ostensibly the opponents of their Armenian rivals, also wanted to throw a spanner in the works of perestroika since corruption in Azerbaijan is a national scandal. When lumpen elements began attacking Armenian homes in Sumgait, the authorities made no attempt to intervene, and the Russian Army had to be flown in to stop the rioting. At the time of writing military intervention and a curfew appear to have put the lid on a still-volatile situation.

Western commentators are rubbing their hands with glee at the prospect of the "break up of the Russian Empire" after the recent events. In reality there is no likelihood of this happening. But the nationalities issue could give Gorbachev a headache, and rally his opponents round the banner of crushing "disorder" in the event of his economic policies not succeeding. The nationalities on the fringes of the USSR are many and small in numbers - the Armenians with about 4 million are one of the largest - and evidence has shown that without the successful military intervention of a foreign imperialism, they cannot "break loose". And indeed it is wishful thinking on the part of Western imperialist observers to assume that they all wish to. Take Armenian nationalism, for example. It is not anti-Russian, but for historical reasons, pro-Russian and the Armenian elite has provided a disproportionate part of the Soviet elite (e.g. Mikoyan). A Christian feudal state swallowed up by the Moslem Turks in the fourteenth century, half of historical Armenia was liberated by Russia in 1878. Armenian nationalism thereafter sought union of the irredentist territories with Russia. The pro-Russian sentiments of the Armenians led to the genocide of possibly 2 millions at the Turks' hands in 1915-16. Survivors returned to Russia after the Bolshevik revolution, and even after 1945 the Armenian SR was Zion for many to which over 250,000 of its diaspora continued to return. It is clear that the agitation in Armenia has mass support and that the Moslem Azerbaijanis are seen as a modern version of the Moslem Turks.

In Azerbaijan and the Central Asian Moslem Republics such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan the Soviet rulers face greater problems, especially with the volatile situation in neighbouring Iran and Afghanistan. But one of the effects of 70 years of rule from Moscow has produced is the elimination of the social basis for an Iranian-style uprising. The bazaar is not a social force in Moslem USSR, since the petty-bourgeoisie is so weak, and the mosque does not have the social power (alms, education) which it wields in certain Islamic states.

Other national issues are headaches for Gorbachev - such as the desire of the Crimean



Tatars or Volga Germans to return to their homelands, whence Stalin swept them in 1941-5 for alleged pro-Hitler sympathies. But none of these pose the slightest threat to the stability of the regime. Baltic nationalism is often seen as the Achilles heel of the Soviet Empire, but here too an element of wishful thinking is evident. There were demonstrations in the Baltic states to commemorate the anniversary of their independence in 1918 and next year could be tense for Moscow with the anniversary of their re-incorporation into the Soviet Union as part of the Nazi-Soviet pact. However, it is in the Baltic Republics that glasnost and perestroika have been most popular and the local bureaucracy, unlike elsewhere, is firmly pro-Gorbachev. Nationalist agitation is split between western style democratic elements and proto-fascist groups who look back to the three states' tutelage by Nazi Germany, neither of which command the mass support that lay behind Solidarnosc in Poland.

CONCLUSION

Whatever the outcome of the present national ferment in the USSR it will not bring down the regime, though it may contribute to its evolution. What it has shown is that the national problem, which the Stalinist bureaucracy and many of its admirers (and even opponents) had assumed was solved, has re-emerged with the social and economic crisis. Factions of the bureaucracy in power and petty-bourgeoisie out of power have managed to play the national card with the resultant large scale disorder, but with little success whether in China with the Tibetans, Roumania with the Hungarian Transylvanians, or in Yugoslavia with the Albanians of Kossovo. The Stalinist (or post-Stalinist) bureaucracy has, as in Russia, contained nationalist agitation. The centralisation of capital under state capitalism and the lack of an indigenous bourgeoisie means that the restoration of "independence" in these areas awaits an imperialist war.

As yet the working class remains silent. One aspect of this is positive. Nationalist groupings in the USSR gain little support from the working class. There was no workplace violence, or nationalist strike action in Transcaucasia recently. Clearly the proletariat was not engaged in the ethnic and religious violence. On the other hand, the class has not yet responded to the implications of glasnost, adopting a "wait and see" standpoint on plans for its greater exploitation. Unlike the feeble nationalist groups, the proletariat is a social force which has the power to challenge Gorbachev and change society. And only the working class can put a final end to national oppression and to all the nationalist maggots who feed on it.

The communist attitude to nationalist disputes like the one over Nagorno-Karabakh is that what is at issue is the control of a fiefdom that distributes jobs and privilege to the middle class and the bureaucracy, and is not an issue that concerns the working class. That does not mean that had we support in Transcaucasia we would stay silent. No, we would denounce the nationalist and ethnic agitation and violence and call for united class action against it in the form of strikes, workers' patrols and defence units, against the call for military "protection". In the broader sense, while opposing all national oppression and favouring full cultural autonomy, we oppose all attempts to use national issues for revanchist or irredentist ends, by elements of social classes hostile to the interests of the working class.

THE POVERTY

INTRODUCTION

When the Labour Governments of 1945-51 and 1964-70 instituted reforms such as the provision of social security or the Rent Act many thought these were permanent steps towards a socialist society which could be built on to bring about the gradual euthanasia of capitalism. Such fond illusions! The new Social Security law, the imminent abolition of the Rent Acts and the attacks on the NHS all reveal the fragility of capitalist welfare measures. Some apparent reforms are not even a step forward in the short term since they merely bring another capitalist horror. (For example, the 1967 Rent Act which controlled rents but which also led to a shortage of rented accommodation.)

Whilst genuine revolutionaries have always

fought against attacks on working class standards of life, it is playing capital's game to suspend the struggle against capital itself in favour of campaigning for a 'friendly' government which MIGHT give the 'reforms' back. Economic crises are intrinsic to capitalism. No matter which party is in power cuts in social services and declining living standards are the inevitable product of the strategy of the capitalist class to reduce 'unproductive expenditure'. And Labour, no less than the Tories gives priority to the welfare of capital, not the well-being of the working class. Consider, for example, that in 1951 it was Labour that first introduced the principle of paying for prescriptions and that the Labour Government of 1974-79, with its wage ceilings and public spending cuts, represented only a failed

version of Thatcher's policies.

In these two articles we analyse the latest attacks on the social wage. They cannot be ignored by communists but we offer no spurious 'campaigns' as a solution. Pandering to the illusions about the Labour Party and the TUC isn't realism or 'tactics' - it is an abdication of the basic revolutionary task of pointing the way towards a struggle against the system itself. In the first instance we cannot expect a mass communist movement to emerge. Only by creating a kernel of conscious workers from those who are already disillusioned with Labour and the unions can the struggle against the increasingly intolerable conditions under which we live be transformed into a struggle for a new society.



THE PROBLEM

Just as capitalism has shown time and time again that it is unable to feed everyone, so too is it unable to house everyone. Even in relatively "well off" countries like Britain, the housing problem is steadily getting worse. Homelessness amongst the working class is rising steadily and some 4 million people who do have homes live in sub-standard accommodation, much of it classified as unfit for human habitation.

The real number of homeless people is unknown, but in 1985 London's official homeless was estimated to have risen to over 14000 in 15 years. Such figures do not include squatters (of whom there are 30-35000 in London alone). The numbers of "concealed" homeless are also growing. This includes those young people who cannot afford to move away from their parents house even if the accommodation is overcrowded, and those who have in law made themselves "intentionally homeless" by such actions as moving out of a house under the threat of eviction without waiting for the actual eviction.

For many families, the real ordeal of homelessness begins when they are accepted by their local councils and sent to hostels or bed and breakfast hotels to wait to be rehoused. This can take anything up to 4 years. Most families lack access to cookers and bathrooms, and up to 6 homeless people can be crowded into 1 room.

Homelessness on such a massive scale is here to stay. While one and a half million families wait on council housing lists, fewer new houses are being built. "New starts" in council housing have fallen from 170,000 in 1976 to under 34,000 in 1986, and capital expenditure has been falling ever since the cuts made by the Labour Government in 1975. The Labour run council of Liverpool alone will have demolished 3,000 more homes than it will have built by 1989.

Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that there is a housing "shortage". The existing housing stock could house everyone. But the housing stock includes those empty homes which the various councils cannot afford to repair, the second and third homes of the bosses, and those homes deliberately left empty by landlords who don't find it profitable to rent. Local councils in England and Wales have 116,000 empty properties, but since capitalism is such a wasteful system, these homes are not going to the homeless. Only 27,700 of these homes are fit to let. The rest are being left to rot. Over 2,000 at least have been empty for over a year. The Labour council of Newham spends 300 per family per week

on bed and breakfast bills (subsidised by the DHSS) yet it can't afford to renovate its 2,000 empty properties. The Labour borough of Hackney spends 4 millions a year on bed and breakfast bills for its homeless, whom it cannot afford to rehouse in its 3,752 empty council houses. It prefers to create even more homelessness by evicting its squatters. The housing problem is a permanent feature of class society. Every attempt that the bosses' governments make to solve it is doomed to failure. Capitalism is only capable of replacing old slums with new ones, from the "Homes fit for Heroes" built after World War One to the estates and high rise blocks built in the '50's and '60's. Today all the "old" problems still exist; overcrowding, poor sanitation, the lack of basic amenities and structural decay. The post World War Two estates have merely added their own problems of poor design, resulting in dampness, vandalism and heating systems too expensive to run. The use of shoddy building materials has led to serious defects in such housing; many modern homes have decayed beyond repair. In all 20 billions needs to be spent on public housing, and 30 billions on repairs to private rented stock. The budget allows for one billion.

THE NEW ACT

The aim of the present Government is to cut down state expenditure as far as possible. As a result it has launched its Housing Bill, hoping that through this Bill the "free market" will eventually provide almost all general needs housing.

First of all, the Government hopes to encourage private landlords to rent out their property. As an incentive, rents are to go up, so that the landlord will be attracted to the thought of making a profit. Rents are to rise to "market levels", but housing benefit will be limited "to ensure that rents are not increased simply because housing benefit is available to pay them" (Housing White Paper). However, if a landlord wishes to charge above the limit set for housing benefit, he is free to do so. And since tenants can be evicted for "persistent delay" in paying rent, then tenants waiting for housing benefit payments, or those trying to find the extra rent, will soon find themselves homeless. Rents are set to rise so high that many people will find themselves paying out more in rent than they would if they were buying the same property and getting mortgage tax relief.

To make landlords feel even safer, the Bill will give tenants fewer rights than before. For tenants under assured tenancies, rent can be set by a Rent Assessment Committee, but landlords and tenants can also "agree" to a higher rent than the one set by the RAC. The security of tenure for assured tenants (compared to the present regulated tenants) will be reduced in 5 ways, and landlords now have the excuse of eviction because of

"redevelopment". This will allow property speculators to evict, for example, tenants in houses of multiple occupation without offering them suitable alternative accommodation, and then turn the HMO's into self contained flats for a large profit.

In reality, assured tenants will be given very little assurance at all. Landlords no longer have to be registered, and tenants will have no assurance that the property will be in a reasonable condition. Assured shorthold tenancies can last for a period as short as 6 months, and the landlord can repossess his property anytime after that. Tenants may have to pursue civil action for repairs, as well as for damages for illegal eviction.

By reducing the rights of tenants, the Housing Minister Mr Waldegrave thinks a quarter of a million new lettings will appear in the next 10 years. This isn't likely to happen, but what is likely is that bad housing and homelessness will increase. Already, over half the rents in London are outside Rent Act controls, yet the private sector is still declining, with a loss of between 5 and 7,000 privately rented homes since 1979 - an all time high. Landlords make more money by selling in a booming market, as well as using their property as bed and breakfast hostels for homeless families.

CONSERVATIVE TRICKS

But the step towards private landlords is not a step towards the free market and away from state control, as the Tories would have us believe. The Government will pay a great deal of the increased rents through housing benefit, no matter how much people may be forced to pay on top. What's more, the current market in private renting has become artificially inflated, since many landlords in the past preferred unemployed tenants who could claim large amounts of housing benefit. Even though the Government has cut housing benefit 7 times in the past 4 years, it still admits that new landlords will be attracted by "the combination of rent deregulations and access to public subsidy in the form of housing benefit" (White Paper). This means that the situation which exists in many areas, where low paid workers cannot afford to rent, will get worse. Many low income families could be paying up to half their net income in housing costs before they qualify for housing benefit.

The most important part of the Bill is the "change of landlord" scheme, which will enable council tenants to opt out of local authority control. It used to be called "choice of landlord" but this had to be changed for obvious reasons. In reality, tenants will have very little say in the matter, since they will be the last people in the process to be consulted. The landlord (whether it be a Housing Association, a Cooperative or a private individual) will have most power from the start. Any landlord, once he has registered with the Housing Corporation, and once he has found the property he wants, can demand the names and addresses of the tenants, as well as the right to inspect the property. If a landlord is unhappy about the price he can take it to

OF REFORMISM

arbitration. Once both sides have agreed on a price, the tenants can vote to go with the new landlord. If fewer than half object, the deal will go ahead. Tenants have two weeks to register any objections to the landlord, and since only the landlord will know how many objections there are, most deals are sure to go ahead. Tenants who don't vote are held to have voted in favour of the deal. There are several weaknesses in the scheme. Although the Government sees Housing Associations as being a key element, and although it wants them to expand, it will cut their grants by 50% or more. HA's are expected to borrow money from building societies and other financial institutions, but this could only be covered by raising rents (which are estimated to rise between 50 to 100%, depending on the area)

Their success in raising capital seems doubtful, especially since 3 West London Housing Associations tried to raise £50 millions on the money markets to provide homes for 1,500 families and failed just days before the White Paper was published. The City is simply not interested in the lower end of the market, and HA rents are set to go beyond the reach of the very people they are supposed to help. The new tenants of HA's will be assured tenants or shorthold tenants, and will face the same insecurities as with private landlords.

Housing Associations and Housing Action Trusts (HAT's) will have no statutory duty to provide for the homeless and will not be able to afford to take on low paid families. HAT's will be run by Government appointed businessmen to take over and then sell off inner city areas. For tenants, getting repairs and maintenance work completed will be a nightmare, especially where estates have been split up, and where the same tower block could have various different landlords. The councils will be left with the job of housing the homeless, but with reduced stock and reduced finances.

The Bill also hopes to encourage home ownership, and wants to extend the "right to buy" scheme. As part of this the Government is now proposing that the cost floor rule be abolished. Previously, a tenants discount could not push the purchase price of a house below the cost incurred since March 31, 1974, in respect of the property. If the Government does away with this rule, all new council house building will stop, since councils will not build houses for sale at such a huge loss. Furthermore, the losses made by the council because of the difference between the real price and the sale price, will be shifted onto the tenants who will face an increase in rents.

The "right to buy" scheme, supported by Labour and Tory alike, is not just a "solution" to the housing problem, but is also designed to divide the working class, making the home owners believe they have a stake in the system. The better paid workers are encouraged to buy a part of "peoples capitalism", and the Government is bending over backwards hoping to keep prices affordable, so that they don't put too much pressure on wages. Government subsidies therefore include mortgage interest tax relief as well as improvement grants, and the sale of council houses themselves, which, after all, are no more than subsidised house sales.

MORE SOCIAL INSECURITY

In direct contrast to the recent Budget, which gave thousands of pounds per week to the Government's rich friends and supporters, the changes to Social Security provisions from the beginning of April constitute a further round in the bourgeoisie's offensive against the working class. It is not our aim to provide a comprehensive account of the new legislation, but rather to show how the Social Security changes correspond not only with the ideology of the Thatcherite Right but, more importantly, with the requirements of the 'regeneration' of British capital.

Supplementary Benefit has been abolished to be replaced with Income Support, which is basically Supplementary Benefit with less benefits. It will no longer be possible to claim allowances above the scale rates for things like heating and laundry costs. Instead a series of premiums will exist and will be payable automatically to claimants in certain categories. (For example, people with children will get 'Family Premium'.) In keeping with the government's strategy, those who will suffer the most will be young and single. They will not be entitled to any premiums and will lose entitlement to previous additional benefits. However, it is

For all lower paid workers, however, the picture is different. In 1980 the subsidy to the housing sector was £7.7 billions, of which 4.8 went to owner occupiers through tax relief and 2.9 billions to subsidise council rents. This was cut to £1.9 billions in 1984. This has resulted in rent rises of 113% between 1979 and 1984, along with the cuts in housing benefits. Since mortgage interest relief is weighted in favour of those with higher incomes, lower paid workers are forced to live in the houses that no one wants and the flats (only 4% of which have been sold). At present one quarter of the people who live in London cannot afford to buy even the cheapest of flats, and the average house price in the Capital now stands at £79,000. The poorest sectors of the working class, those who rely on housing benefit, will face cuts which will mean that 93% of housing benefit recipients will be worse off. The total number of recipients will be reduced by one quarter.

With the introduction of the poll tax, the situation is set to get even worse. The "community charge" will be paid by everyone in Britain over 18, including the homeless. Those who will pay most will be the people in the inner cities, living in single rooms or in overcrowded houses and flats. The beneficiaries of the poll tax will be those who have more than one large house. Certain councils are already acting ahead of the Housing Bill and are putting some of its ideas into practice. Tower Hamlets has already evacuated one tower block before demolition because it spoiled the view for a private block behind. Lewisham council is considering housing its homeless in garages. Westminster council has labelled almost half its stock for sale, which will mean another 500 families being placed in bed and breakfast to wait on average 4 years for rehousing. Westminster council realises it cannot cope with the burden of homeless families and is currently looking at areas in the South East, where it hopes to deport its homeless. As one Housing Officer said: "With a bit of luck, the homeless will just give up"

THE SOLUTION

The Labour Party's scheme for housing would not benefit the working class any more than the present Tory scheme. Last year the Labour Party hit upon the idea of using management companies to run council estates, bringing in private capital for repairs and renovation work. Management company boards, under this scheme would be split 3 ways, with councillors, tenants and investors all getting an equal say. A system of subsidy for housing repairs would allow banks and other private investment groups to make a profit from lending the estates money. Of course the "triple split" would mean that financiers and councillors could outvote the tenants and push rents up. Certain Labour authorities, however, although publicly denouncing the Tory Bill, are making their own preparations for it. The Labour authorities in Lambeth have been denouncing the idea of HAT's but are said to have been privately asking ministers to consider their estates for

hardly likely that anyone will be better off, even those who will qualify for premiums. Under the old regulations single payments were available (often after a prolonged battle with the DHSS bureaucracy) for essentials such as beds and cookers if acute need were shown. Under the new system all single payments have been abolished. Instead claimants (after convincing DHSS officials that there are no friends, relatives or charities to approach) MAY be able to obtain a loan from the 'Social Fund', the repayments being deductible from future benefits at source. Obviously this negates any advantages afforded by the negligible increases in standard rates. Moreover the burden of supporting the unemployed will pass increasingly to already hard-pressed families and friends.

Changes to housing benefit mean that claimants now have to pay 20% of their rates and water rates will not be covered at all. The main aim of this penalty clause for being poor is to pave the way for the Poll Tax which itself is a measure to shift the burden of taxation further onto the working class. Housing Benefit will no longer be payable to anyone with over 3,000 pounds of savings, thus removing thousands of pensioners and older workers from entitlement. So much for the bourgeois virtue of thrift - if you are working class you get clobbered anyway. If all this were not enough, the bourgeoisie has more treats in store. There are proposals to abolish rent controls thus making it even harder for workers to obtain housing.

trusts when the Bill becomes law. Other Labour councils are taking more direct action to solve their housing problems. Camden council tried to solve its homeless problem by issuing travel warrants to Irish families for the Republic of Ireland.



New slums for old:
All that decadent capitalism can offer the working class.

Certain parties of the left, however, refuse to lose their faith in Labour councils or in capitalism as a whole. Last year Socialist Worker Review (March '87) told us that: "the only way homelessness can be eradicated is through a massive injection of funds". In reality, the problem is a little more serious. Firstly, the capitalists at the present time are hamstrung by the recession and quite unable to provide the required "massive injection". Secondly, even in periods of prosperity, there are never enough funds to house everyone adequately, for a system that runs on profit cannot cater for need.

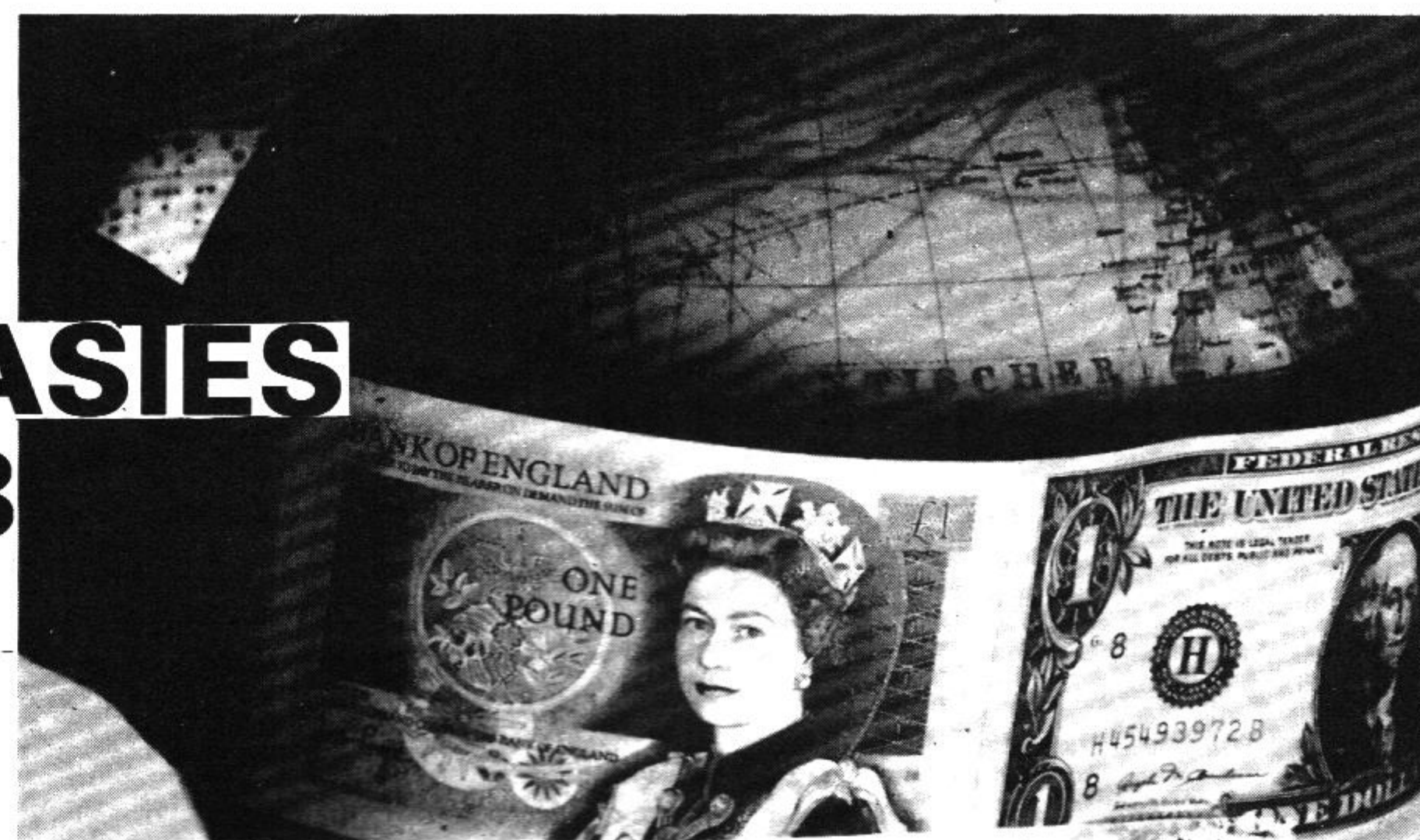
The housing problem was not created by capitalism, and cannot be solved by it. It has existed in every class society, and will exist until class society is abolished. As Engels wrote in the "Housing Question": "As long as the capitalist mode of production contrives to exist, it is folly to hope for an isolated settlement of the housing question, or of any other social question affecting the lot of the workers. The solution lies in the abolition of the capitalist mode of production and the appropriation of all the means of subsistence and instruments of labour by the working class itself". The working class alone is capable of solving the housing problem, but it can only do this after it has taken state power. As part of the dismantling of the capitalist power structure in the post-revolutionary period, the sharp demarcation between town and country which currently exists will be abolished and the whole structure of town life altered. The existing situation of the present cities makes an abolition of the housing problem impossible. Only when the existing housing "surplus" has been taken over by the working class as part of its more general revolutionary attack on the capitalist state will the housing question finally begin to be solved.

What, therefore, is behind this latest bourgeois offensive? Obviously the new system is designed to cost less. Welfare is the single most expensive item in government spending, but this is not the only objective of the state. The fact that the Chancellor has been able to cut taxes, coupled with static levels of unemployment indicates that at least in the short term, the state could maintain pre-April levels of welfare spending without precipitating a crisis of overspending. More significantly, the reduction of benefit provision makes life on the dole less tenable for those who may be claiming benefit. By cutting state benefits the state can force down the wages of the entire working class, a necessary prerequisite for the profitability of capital.

If dire poverty does not force claimants into the sweatshops, the increasing harassment of the unemployed through 'Re-Start' ("take this job or we'll stop your benefit") interviews will take care of a good many more. The most obvious example of this policy is the situation of 16-19 year olds who will not be eligible for unemployment benefits and will have to accept any job or a useless training scheme. In addition, the period for disqualification from unemployment benefit for those who leave work voluntarily has been increased from 13 to 26 weeks, so forcing workers to stay in the most unbearable jobs. Working class youth have been particularly singled out for attack because they tend to be marginalised and have little opportunity

FROM EMANCIPACION OBRERA — ARGENTINA

THE NEVER ENDING FANTASIES OF FOREIGN DEBT: PART 3



Never mind the social revolution - it's time to help the exploiters! To the acclaim of South American "anti-imperialists", "communists", unionists and left-wing intellectuals, Fidel Castro has announced that this is not a revolutionary period, and that the essential problem facing South America and the Caribbean is that of foreign debt.

The problems of debt are problems of the bourgeoisie. And we are not the only ones to recognise this. We quote below from "El Economista", genuine representative of big Argentinian capital, on the subject of the left, in particular on FREPU (PC, MAS etc).

"...(FREPU) claims to regroup within its confused ideological boundaries, both those who usually vote for the PC, MAS and their allies, and large sectors of the middle classes which are claimed to have been radicalised. Recently, recruitment speeches have been directed towards the "bourgeoisie"."

With regard to this, they go on to analyse the unilateral moratorium, the break with the IMF, and in the case of MAS, policies aiming to change from within that which they describe as a "liberal democracy". (11)

Fidel Castro, too, in another part of his is clear enough on this:

"We are neither planning nor advocating revolutionary changes: we are planning a national liberation movement through the struggle for non-payment of debt, for the creation of a New International Economic Order, for South American unity. It is a struggle for the liberation of the people of the continent."

Let's take a closer look at this.

ADVANTAGES FOR THE BOURGEOISIE IN OPPOSING THE IMF

The following arguments for non-payment of debt (or the moratorium) are put forward by these parties and individuals:

"We must be concrete. Talk of bourgeois exploitation all sounds rather abstract to the class, and does not mobilise it. On the other hand, it is possible to mobilise against foreign debt. Moreover, campaigns against debt are more unifying, as a broad front can be created around this issue. On the other hand, in the working class struggle against bourgeois exploitation, the class stands alone, and there are so few workers.. First of all we must strengthen capitalism, in order to have more workers. Then, indeed, it will be time to struggle for the Socialist Revolution."

For these people, the fact that the factory bosses, often with the help of the provincial or national banks, close the factories, throwing onto the streets workers unable to find other work, is not something sufficiently concrete to struggle against. Nor is it sufficiently concrete that the bosses are lowering the workers' real wages, imposing compulsory overtime, and laying workers off. And the struggle against capital, against that living capital which is exploiting us daily, is not concrete. Let's see what's so concrete about the struggle against payment of foreign debt.

The strange thing about this "struggle" is that the working class can take no concrete action to carry it out: it can't refuse to pay (as it could the landlord, or the corner shop) because it received nothing from the IMF and signed no agreement. There are only two courses of action

available to the class in this context: either to put pressure on the government, so that the latter refuses to pay its debts (as recommended by Fidel Castro) or to overthrow the government in order to achieve non-payment. And let us say - if the working class has the power to impose upon the government a measure it is reluctant to take, or to overthrow the government, why should it not use that power to put an end to exploitation? Or, if it is not quite that strong, it could use its strength to increase real wages, and guarantee the class a percentage of the 60% of GNP which is legally stolen from it, to reduce the working day, to insist that the bourgeoisie guarantee work or payment in lieu to the class, and to obtain free medical treatment and adequate housing.

So the practical content of the struggle against "dependence" (?) is to happily let be the home bourgeoisie, and to present the root of all evil as something foreign, exterior to the country, when in fact the causes of unemployment, repression, reductions in wages (whilst the bosses grow richer, accumulating luxuries) are concrete and clearly Argentinian - the cause of the trouble is capitalism, the bourgeois class and its system of exploitation. The same thing is happening everywhere - Brazil, Paraguay, America, France. In all countries, with or without debts, the working class is exploited, millions are unemployed, wage cuts take place and workers' resistance and anticapitalist movements are repressed.

Nationalist politics suits the bourgeoisie fine, for it channels the workers' discontent against the competitors of the home bourgeoisie. Despite its differences with the nationalist left, the bourgeoisie greatly appreciates the latter's contribution to social peace.

DEBT: PROBLEM OF THE BOURGEOISIE

We shall not dwell upon the subject.

Let's simply say that debt will always be something the bourgeoisie thumps down on the table to justify its policies, and that the petty bourgeoisie will always support it in this.

In reality, neither debtors nor creditors understand how to resolve the problem of debt. Don't be surprised if the same bourgeoisie which is now opposed to the moratorium and criticises the nationalist left for its immaturity, soon organises a moratorium or announces the suspension of payments. This would be neither new nor revolutionary.

Few realise this, but the USA itself features amongst those who don't pay their debts when it suits them not to.

Halfway through the last century, the USA was a country with a medium to low level of capital accumulation, which made wide use of European finance. In London, the main market at the time, the US was seen as "a little developed country where embezzlement abounds, fraudulent announcements are made, and terms of payment fail to be observed. London banks and investors, persuaded by the firm Baring, had risked money in North American bonds and credits, but the US government, fired by the popular resentment of foreign banks, refused to impose the taxes necessary to pay the interest" (13).

In 1839 there was an economic crisis and some big banks collapsed. The most

prosperous states, Maryland and Pennsylvania, could not pay their debts and Mississippi and Louisiana were in arrears. In 1875, the State of Mississippi issued a constitutional amendment by which it simply repudiated its debts. So a large part of the debt was either not paid at all or paid very reluctantly. And this did not lead to any improvement in conditions for the working population, especially not for coloured people living in these states - quite the opposite. Repression of the blacks continued the same or more intensely than before and their living conditions grew so bad they could not get worse. In this period the USA continued to expand, taking over the land of other bourgeoisies, such as that of Mexico and Cuba.

We use this information to emphasise that whatever the bourgeoisie does - here or anywhere else - the fate of the working class and other sectors of toilers does not depend on whether things are going well or badly for the ruling class of their own country or any other. Rather, workers must rid themselves of the bourgeoisie forever.

No doubt the issue of debt will give rise to thousands more speculations, various crises and alliances and all sorts of competition. All these cases will have one factor in common - the problem will be that of one sector of the bourgeoisie up against another sector. But our problem is the existence of the bourgeoisie in its entirety, in all its sectors, including that of the left-wing collaborators.

Notes

(11) El Economista 4.10.85 p 8

(12) The majority of countries no have enormous national and private debts. The USA, for example, has a balance of trade deficit of 200,000 dollars for this year alone and its national debt is two billion dollars. Will they advocate non-payment?

(13) Quoted from Anthony Sampson, The Banks and the World Crisis

COMMUNIST REVIEW No 6

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- * Gorbachev's Restructuring of Russian Capitalism
- * Gramsci's Concept of Hegemony

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We are reprinting here a brief article we wrote in May 1978 on the anniversary of the mass strike in France in 1968 which was the first generalised re-awakening of the class struggle after the years of post-war reconstruction. The reprinting of the text is particularly relevant in that 1978 was, like 1988, a year of fairly low level class struggle after the euphoria and mass conflicts of the period 1968-1974 (France, UK, Italy, Portugal etc). Then the CWO took, as it takes now, a long-term view and indeed in the period 1979-84 a new wave of class

struggle erupted. Again, there has been reflux, and again the Jeremiahs proclaim that the "class struggle is dead". Again they will be proved wrong! Indeed, the last months have seen stirrings in the UK, Germany and elsewhere that foretell a renewal of the social conflict which is never far from the surface of even the calmest periods of capitalist life.

(N.B. A couple of paragraphs dealing with the forthcoming elections in France in 1978 have been omitted from the reprinted text.)

MAY '68: 10 YEARS ON

The elections have obscured the anniversary of a far greater struggle by the French workers, that of May-June 1968. If this is being recalled at all, it is only to ceremoniously bury it as an inexplicable accident. In May 9 to 10 million workers came out in the biggest strike in history. The movement began with a rash of factory occupations that became a flood. Intense political discussion took place in the work places, and at first no economic demands came from the workers. Only when the unions negotiated a wage rise of 10% did the question of wage rises surface and at first the class united in a massive rejection of this offer. Eventually the movement, lacking direction, ran out of steam and the C.G.T. (C.P. dominated union) was able to get an agreement to return to work on an improved offer. Even this only happened after De Gaulle had mobilised the army for a show-down.

Despite being the first real sign that the epoch of counter-revolution was coming to an end, the proletarian movement of May-June 1968 suffered from severe weaknesses. The movement showed that the volcano of the class struggle, pronounced extinct, was indeed only dormant, and that it took only a minor spark for the new generation of workers, which had emerged since the Second World War, to launch into struggle. But the movement never developed any clear political inspiration on its own, and at that time revolutionaries were too isolated and lacking in clarity to intervene in any effective way. The fact that the "spark" to the movement came from the battles of the students with the police in the Latin Quarter with their vague libertarianism and rejection of the "consumer society" is a testimony to the movement's political weakness. However the influence of this in detonating the strike is exaggerated: 4 million days were lost in strikes in 1967, many of which resulted in occupations and clashes with the police. Clearly the workers felt a fundamental hostility to the system, but in the face of their inability to articulate it politically, the unions soon re-established their control. The class never challenged the unions to any significant extent in May though in a few areas action committees or base committees did emerge. In 1968 the unions were still capable of delivering the goods, in the form of meaningful wage increases. The improved offers, of around 15% at a time when inflation was a third of that, succeeded when direct opposition would have failed. It is true that the straws in the wind already foretold the capitalist crisis: devaluations in Britain, U.S. trade balance, slowing of economic growth and in the late '60s the rate of increase in working class living standards began to slow down. But the crisis was very under-developed in 1968 and capital still had the leeway to make substantial concessions when faced with such a massive class movement.



Where are they now? Students and workers fight together on the picket lines in '68

Since May 1968 inflation and unemployment have put the "gains" achieved then into reverse, and the crisis has intensified. This has not met with a new upsurge of the class; quite the contrary, since for the French workers the decade since May 1968 has been one of relative class peace - the last five years especially. For the moment, the initiative lies firmly with the ruling class. This applies also to the international scene. The massive upsurge of class struggle of 1968-72, unleashed by the first stirrings of the crisis, achieved economic gains which soon evaporated. The deepening of the crisis has added a dimension of fear and insecurity to the pessimism registered by the failure of the early struggles to win lasting gains. But stirrings of class struggle are again being heard in the semi-industrialised peripheries of capital, and there are signs that even within the capitalist heartlands the proletariat is once again on the move. We cannot predict whether we are on the verge of another upheaval or not. We can only say that as long as capitalism exists it will be torn by class struggle until the final revolutionary conflict, of which May 1968 was a harbinger.

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MAY '68 AND THE COURSE
OF HISTORY.

Twenty years after the
mass strike, how have
developments confirmed
or questioned communist
perspectives?

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THE POVERTY OF REFORMISM

to fight back. They have no experience of workplace solidarity and any protest can be passed off as juvenile delinquency. Moreover the new legislation will make it increasingly difficult for young people to leave the family home which will reduce expenditure on housing benefit and keep youth under family discipline.

How then can the working class resist this latest attack on its standard of living? It is obvious that anyone looking to the Labour Party will be acutely disappointed. The Labour Party has been highly vocal about increasing funding to the NHS. The NHS is especially popular with the lower middle class voters that Labour needs to woo from the Tories in order to win an election, but these potential voters who may be prepared to forego the odd penny in the pound tax cut to pay for the NHS are rather less enthusiastic about funding welfare. Labour's opposition to the benefit cuts has been limited to the odd whining speech in Parliament but, more significantly, the Labour Party has not even pledged to reverse a single cut made by the Tories. It must be remembered that Labour, for all its pretences to the contrary, represents the interests of British capital and is not averse to increasing the exploitation of the working class to keep British capitalism profitable.

It may be that sheer hopelessness will push many youth to revolt as they did in 1980, 1981 and 1982 but isolated outbreaks like this, without a clear political aim, can be dismissed by the ruling class as mere riots. Let's not pretend that the struggle against these new attacks will be easy. The unemployed on their own cannot win. Anomie and isolation, combined with social clubs, set up by Labour councils, where the unemployed can dissipate their energies have made it very difficult for a collective struggle to emerge. What is needed is for the unemployed to see themselves as part of the working class as a whole. A step towards this would be organisation of support for other workers on strike at the same time as drawing on the support of those with jobs against social security cuts. It is from the rage of the whole working class, not the demobilising campaigns of the 'Labour Movement', that a real resistance to these latest cuts can emerge.

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WORKERS VOICE

ULSTER JOB LAWS

A FEW CRUMBS FOR THE SLAVES

In the working class streets of Ulster the recent upsurge in paramilitary violence and the attendant escalation of outright sectarian killings is a distressing spectacle. To have it compounded by the inane utterances of every bourgeois press hack and petty politician is literally to add insult to injury. Right or left they reflect, "the more things change, the more they remain the same", the suggestion being that the present wave of violence is only the latest manifestation of some kind of Irish pathological desire for self-destruction, which goes back at least three centuries.

Western imperialism's ruling class proper, as represented by the British Government, is not so stupid. It knows that the present twenty year old conflict has always drawn its strength from the material grievances of the Catholic working class in particular, even though the political demands of any subsequent movement have been largely bent out of shape by petty-bourgeois Irish nationalism. Indeed the key policy of all British Governments, at least since direct rule in 1972, has been to attempt to pacify the Catholic workers by persuading them that sectarian Unionist practice was being reformed and restructured away by authority from London. Needless to say this is not benevolence on the Governments part, but an attempt to isolate the IRA and cheapen at least the security burden of the unwanted province.

It is in this context that we must see the Government's proposed new legislation on job discrimination. First announced in March it will probably not pass into law for another two years, but it is sure to be dragged up at every opportunity as the Government tries to prove its "democratic" credentials to the Catholic working class and urges it back onto the terrain of constitutional reformist politics, or, in the Government's terms, to return to "normality".

The crux of the new laws is the compulsory monitoring by firms of the number of Protestant and Catholic workers exploited by them. On the basis of the figures a Fair Employment Commission (replacing the ineffective FEA) can issue legally enforceable directions to bosses specifying steps they should take to promote equality of opportunity. Failure to monitor will in itself be an offence (eventually for concerns with

only ten workers) and firms not complying with the Commissions instructions will be deemed to be in contempt of court, meaning the boss could face a fine or even prison. A more realistic sanction is that companies which do not comply will be ineligible for grant aid and banned from tendering for Government contracts.

The British State is serious in these attempts. In the long run it knows that the stability which it desires in Ulster is much harder achieved when there is such flagrant discrimination against two-fifths of the population - e.g. on its own figures Catholic workers have two-and-a-half times the unemployment of Protestants in Europe's unemployment blackspot.

Of course London has also been under political pressure from a trans-Atlantic circus of office-seeking American visitors and companies wanting to clean up the situation for the bloc as a whole, while lining their own nests with capital; political and financial. The proposals have been generally welcomed by the Irish-American lobby as they have by every shade of liberal and reformist mystification from the SDLP to the unions and Labour. The only opponents are Sinn Féin ("inadequate"), the CBI ("unrealistic") and the Unionist Neanderthal right who compare the religious monitoring to that of apartheid - ironically a comparison more often made with their own murderous fifty year sectarian régime!

COMMUNIST POSITION

There is always a difficulty for

Revolutionaries in dealing with so-called "progressive" demands in situations where normal bourgeois-democratic structures do not exist or are stunted, as in Northern Ireland. The fact that the capitalist state itself seems intent on destroying one of the central material manifestations of a sectarian ideology which has helped to divide the working class for generations, provides a perfect example of the apparent contradiction between demands for basic democratic freedoms and the proletariat maintaining its political autonomy.

As was suggested above, the difficulty is only resolved when the material forces behind each movement for reform are examined. The British ruling class was happy to turn a blind eye to the sectarian practice of Unionism while it ensured stability in the area under its control and the extraction of surplus value from "its" workers. Only when that very practice threatened to tear apart the social fabric did the Government "discover" it and begin its efforts to outlaw discrimination.

The question remains: are these moves towards bourgeois-democratic freedom and ethnic equality in the objective political interests of the working class, even though they might be espoused at various times, and for various reasons, by liberal and even rightist factions of the bourgeoisie? The simple answer is that demands for such reforms are not in themselves socialist objectives, though we never fail to denounce the absence of such freedoms and support demands for them.

continued on p.2

THE WSPI: PARLIAMENTARY CRETINS

Readers of *Workers' Voice* in Ireland may be familiar with the World Socialist Party (the WSPI is a "companion" party of the Socialist Party of Great Britain) and its journal *Socialist View*. The WSPI claims to be the only socialist group in Ireland. We cannot deal with all of the WSPI's absurdities here. However a look at its view of socialist revolution, specifically its conception of parliament as the means to revolution, illustrates precisely why the WSPI is not an organisation which defends communist politics but rather is an irrelevance to the needs of the working class.

For the WSPI socialism will come about when a majority of the working class are educated to want it and send delegates to parliament to legislate away capitalism peacefully. Clearly the WSPI have no understanding of the relationship between the present struggles of the working class and the development of socialist consciousness (however much they pretend to when confronted with this central flaw in their "case"). Their view of the development of class consciousness is a pedagogic one. The WSPI aims to convert each worker as a worker to socialism and when there are enough socialists we can then have socialism. They do not see the class struggle as the starting point for the development of class consciousness, a process in which the revolutionary party has a leading role to play. They do not see any connection between the every day struggles of the working class and the future struggle for socialism. Instead parliament and elections are seen as vehicles for the development of socialist consciousness. That the working class can express socialist consciousness through participation in parliament and elections is nonsense. In reality, participation in capitalist elections fragments and atomises the working class into a mass of amorphous

citizens and reinforces illusions in the democratic nature of present society, actively preventing the development of revolutionary consciousness. The bourgeois state cannot be an instrument of socialist transformation because it is structurally adapted to the needs of capitalism. We reaffirm Marx and Lenin's view of the need to completely destroy the bourgeois state and to replace it with new democratic organs of power, the workers' councils.

Capitalism is the most brutal class society in history. (This is only too apparent in situations like the present one in Ireland.) It is impossible for workers in struggle to avoid violent conflict with the state. The WSPI's advocacy of a peaceful revolution through the farce of bourgeois democracy is a criminal illusion which only encourages working class passivity. The state they intend the working class to conquer through parliamentary democracy is the same state which, North and South, systematically terrorises its opponents with highly-trained specialised forces of repression. The reality of totalitarian capitalism is that real power lies outside parliament in the executive, the cabinet, the judiciary, the military, etc. It is only by combatting capitalist austerity, and through the intervention of a programmatically clear class party capable of linking the everyday struggles of the class with a practical and political lead in the struggle for communism, that workers will come to see socialism as the only solution to their problems.

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.

C.W.O.

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