

WORKERS VOICE

COMMUNIST
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ORGANISATION

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AFGHANISTAN: WESTERN IMPERIALISM PRESSES HOME ITS ADVANTAGE

The Red Army's pull-out from Kabul ahead of schedule has nothing to do with 'glasnost'. Nor has it anything to do with a peacemongering Gorbachev. In reality the global retreats of Russian imperialism are rooted in the crisis of Russian state capitalism. Russian capital requires restructuring and productive machinery requires renewing. The only way that the funds to do this can be found is by cutting the massive military budget. To do this it is necessary to create a climate for disarmament treaties and attempt to get the US to do the same. Hence the fires of regional conflict are being extinguished through Russian concessions. In the longer term this is an attempt to build a more dynamic economy in Russia from which a more dynamic challenge to the US can be mounted.

The Afghan war has been imperialist from the start. The Brezhnev invasion of 1979 was an attempt to hold together a divided Afghan CP against an enemy which was being massively armed by Western imperialism. US arms supplies alone amount to \$300 million annually. The retreat in Afghanistan points to the inability of Russian imperialism to successfully confront the US even on its own borders.

However, the Russian retreat does not mean the end of the war. It only means that from now on Russian soldiers will not be doing the fighting. Imperialist war will continue by proxy and the slaughter of Afghans for the interests of Russian and US imperialism will carry on.

NO NEUTRAL REGIME

The Russians have been trying to retreat with some dignity. They have tried to save their clients' skins by doing deals with the Mujahiden. For the last three months the Russian deputy foreign minister Vorontsov has been desperately trying to cobble together a neutral regime to take over in Kabul. His travels have taken him to see the ex-king in Rome, the Shia Mujahiden in Iran and the Peshawar alliance in Pakistan. Contact has even been made with some of the rebel commanders inside the country. All have been made offers, but despite this and despite concessions from the Kabul regime which more or less reverses the reforms of 1978 - the reforms which were the first cause of the war - no neutral regime has been formed.

The only thing which has been achieved by Vorontsov's diplomatic odyssey is to bring into the open the violent divisions amongst the Mujahiden. The Mujahiden as a political force represents the landlords and the clergy who were dispossessed in the land reforms



Russian artillery fighting to keep the Salang road open

of 1978. This is the main division amongst the Mujahiden, but on top of this there is the division between Shia and Sunni Moslems and on top of this the divisions of tribe. The so-called Peshawar alliance consists of seven groups. Three of these are nationalist dominated by the traditional landlord class. The others are fundamentalist Sunnis who favour a Sunni Islamic state. The alliance between these groups is an uneasy one, forced on them by the US. Their forces attack each other in the field and during alliance meetings their leaders' weapons are often drawn. The Iran based Mujahiden, which consists of eight separate groups, are Shias and favour a Shiite Islamic state. They have refused all cooperation with the Peshawar alliance and instead attack them on the battlefield. These divisions ensure that the Mujahiden cannot unite militarily. This means that the rapid collapse of the Kabul regime, so gleefully predicted by the Western bourgeois press, may not automatically follow. It also means that once the regime is overthrown the victors will be at each others' throats.

THE KABUL REGIME

The regime itself, however, cannot survive for long without Russian help. This is because it has lost the support of the peasantry who constitute over 90% of the population. Not only have the peasants been driven off the land in their millions, they have also been driven into the arms of their natural enemies, the landlords and the mosque. Throughout the country villages have been razed to the ground, animals killed, wells and irrigation systems bombed and hundreds of thousands of hectares of orchards and forest reduced to charred stumps to deny the Mujahiden

cover. There are now 5.5 million refugees and 2.5 million displaced people out of a population of 16 million. Even if we include the estimated 1 million dead in the calculation this represents 50% of the population. Agriculture, which in 1978 accounted for 50% of the GDP and 90% of the country's exports, is now so reduced that the country cannot feed itself.

The regime's military strategy is to abandon the countryside and hold the towns. As a result the towns have increased in population dramatically. The population of Kabul, for instance, has quadrupled since 1978. The lifelines of the towns are, of course, the roads and these are becoming increasingly difficult to hold. The people in the towns face slow starvation.

IMPERIALISM'S AIMS

The failure to establish a neutral regime in Kabul means that Russia's aims have been completely frustrated. The US has aimed at the creation of a client state in Afghanistan which would complete the ring of hostile states on Russia's southern border and the most likely outcome of the situation is for more years of war with the possibility of the fighting spilling over into the refugee camps and destabilising the situation in Pakistan, the US main ally in the region.

The Afghan war is another bloody chapter in the book of crimes committed by imperialism, both East and West. Many more such chapters will be written before world capitalism, which is the motor force of imperialism, is destroyed and a proletarian world order is built.

CRISIS AND CLASS STRUGGLE IN NORWAY

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of December the CWO (and other groups of the International Bureau) received a long circular from some communists in Norway who have kept in touch with the revolutionary proletarian camp for many years. The text is written to tell us "important developments seem to be taking place" in Norway to which the comrades wish to alert us. The text begins with an interesting historical essay on the development of Norway which space has forced us to omit. We have instead chosen to focus on the recent developments in the crisis and the class struggle which seems to promise further developments. Anyone wishing for the full text can obtain it from the CWO or by writing to the comrades themselves at: Motiva Forlag, Postboks 9340 Valerenga, N - 0610 Oslo 6, Norway.

THE CRISIS IN NORWAY

The oil industry is rather important to the Norwegian economy. Oil revenues have been able to offset many effects of the crisis, buying Norwegian capital out of most of the effects which the crisis has had internationally. Now this has changed. Oil revenues have declined rapidly with falling oil prices and the deep crisis can no longer be hidden. Now the crisis is hitting Norwegian capitalism with full force and developing rapidly. "Investments in Norwegian industry rose by approximately 50 billion kroner in the period 1984-7. But this expansion of investment made poor profits. Figures from the Norwegian Bank Association demonstrate that profits from fixed capital ... fell by 1.3 billion kroner in the same period. This results in a negative profit for these last 50 billion of approximately 2.5%" (Aftenposten 7.9.88)

Overaccumulation has led to large capitals not productively employed being thrown into the fields of speculation. The stock market and the real estate market as well as the building trades saw a boom which ended abruptly in October 1987 with the stock market crash. After the sudden collapse in 1987, fortunes of speculative capital were destroyed, and unlike in most other countries the stock market has not recovered. Almost

all banks are making big losses for the second consecutive year.

Levels of productive investment fell by approximately 20% from 1987 to 1988 and are likely to fall another 11% in 1988-9. At the same time existing plants are closing or are threatened with closure. Investments in new oil production fields are low, and this of course has had its effects on the industry producing oil production platforms and equipment. The building trades have less work. The newspaper industry is in difficulties; due to large reductions in the earnings from advertisements the whole newspaper business is in difficulties. At least two papers have already closed down, and even the 'richest' newspaper company will have to reduce manning and cut costs. The print industry is in trouble, many companies have closed down this year and many printing workers are unemployed. To give one example of the overaccumulation in the printing industry, the capacity for scanning for the print industry in Norway is supposed to be big enough to fill the demand for scanning of all Western Europe. There are said to be a larger number of scanners in Norway than in Great Britain.

Banking is in difficulties. After two years of heavy losses, and more expected next year, the banks have begun to reduce their workforce. The largest Norwegian bank - Den norske Creditbank - has begun to fire 1050 employees which is one quarter of the staff. Also other banks are firing employees - up to one third of the staff for some of the smaller banks. Several thousand bank employees might lose their jobs in the near future.

Unemployment is currently more than 54,000 and in addition to this more than 20,000 are working under special programmes funded by the state. Approximately half of the workers in the textile industry are unemployed, perhaps as many as 30,000 building and construction workers will lose their jobs. Figures have been published showing that 89,000 jobs will disappear next year, and that unemployment will reach 100,000 this winter.

THE CLASS RESPONSE

The last couple of years have seen several struggles by workers against the closing of

factories or reductions in the number employed. Because these factories are very often the only important one in the town, the resistance to closure is fought not only by the workers, but by the whole population of the town. The workers have not been able to develop an independent class response to the attacks. The method of these struggles is very often to send delegations to the capital to petition the government, parliament and the company owners with the aim of either rescuing their factory or demanding the development of new industry. Often the companies make the continuation of one plant dependent on the closure of another elsewhere in the country, thus setting the workers of different plants against each other.

Open workers' struggles and strikes (except political demonstration strikes) have been few in recent years, and wildcat strikes have been even fewer. At the end of 1987 there was an illegal strike by kindergarten teachers in Oslo, followed by a countrywide teachers' strike at the beginning of this year. Approximately 7,000 teachers were on strike at the most. This strike was peculiar in the sense that it was the first wildcat strike which was not utterly condemned by all of the "establishment". The strike and the situation of the teachers were "understood" or "supported" by forces which usually are the strongest enemies of illegal strikes, e.g. the press, the leaders of the "bourgeois" parties, etc. When workers go on wildcat strikes they usually meet the total condemnation of these same forces. Both these strikes were dominated by the unions even if they were not officially supported by them.

Many of the local struggles taking place are not over the questions of wages or layoffs, but against changes of ownership, mergers, and other changes of the company, or against attacks and harassments of union officials. Thus, for about half a week workers on the oil platforms staged a sitdown strike. They struck against harassment of union officials and the proposed merger of one company with another. The workers feared such a merger would only be for the benefit of the company (a real estate company) and thus drain resources away from 'their' company. 450 workers in five different towns took part in this strike.

Wages have been declining for several years. This year wage rises were restricted to 1 krone per hour, and a law was passed banning all further rises. More than 300,000 protested against this law by going on a two hour demonstration strike on March 11th. Last year there were no general wage rises and only certain groups of workers with local agreements managed to get any wage rise. To illustrate the decline of wages figures have been published showing that as many as 250,000 families have suffered a yearly wage reduction by the equivalent of one monthly wage or more.

In addition the state is trying hard to reduce public consumption and the social wage is being attacked via cuts in local authority spending. Throughout the country perhaps as many as 14,000 jobs in the state and local administrations will disappear this year. These attacks are spread out and differ from one area to another. The unions' response is equally dispersed. Following a 3 hour strike by 30,000 municipal workers in Oslo and demonstration of 10,000 there was a "general strike" in Halden the next day. Out of 26,000 inhabitants 10,000 went on strike and took part in the demonstration organised by the unions to protest against the proposed closing of the local hospital. Yet even though Halden is only 120 kilometres from Oslo the newspapers mentioned nothing about this strike. (The only exception being the social-democratic daily which carried a small notice.) On November 14th in Sauda, a small town on the west coast, 3,000 of the 5,500 inhabitants took part in a demonstration against the closing of the local hospital.

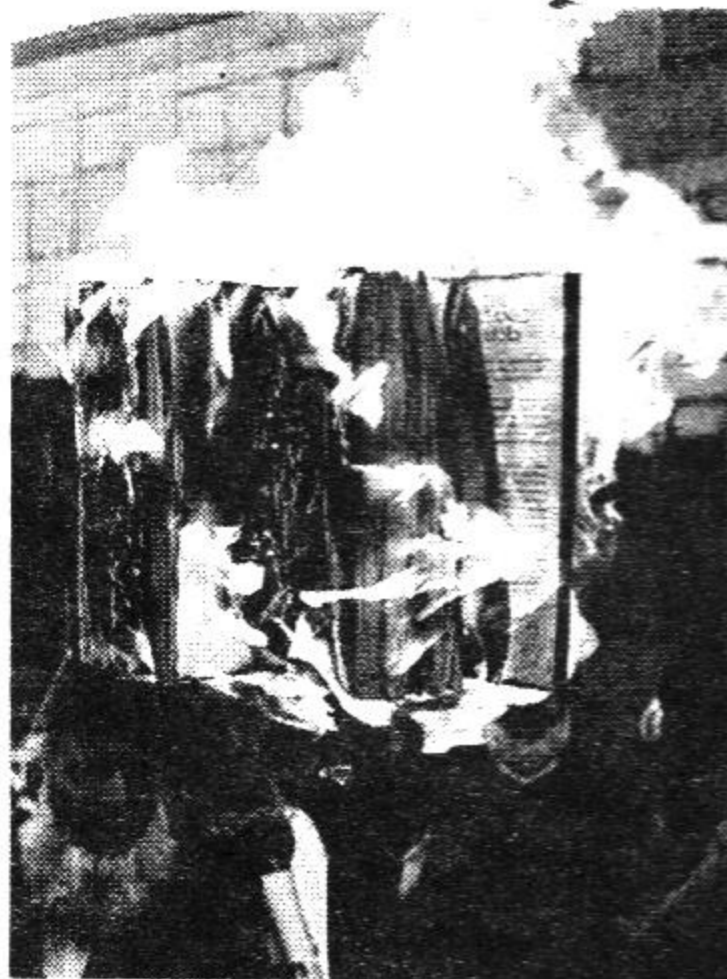
Real wages have been attacked slowly and in different ways. This might explain why rather big reductions have not produced widespread open responses from the workers. The low levels of unemployment up till recently might also be part of the explanation. Many workers think that at least they still have a job even if it is not paid as well as before. The workers have little experience of class struggle. The unions and the left still have a strong influence.

THE BRADFORD BOOK BURNINGS

"When they begin by burning books, they ultimately end up burning people" (Heinrich Heine)



Nazi storm-troopers burning 'anti-German' books
Berlin 1934



Bigots burning Salman Rushdie's
'anti-Islamic' book
Bradford 1989

The lining up of left-wing Labour MPs like Bernie Grant alongside the book-burning imams of the Bradford Mosque has exposed the ideology of 'multiculturalism' for what it is: a reactionary front which not only involves support for religious bigotry but is also a tool for dividing the working class.

Multiculturalism means cultural apartheid, it means ghettos for 'Asians' (especially for women) and for 'Afro-Caribbeans' and all with the blessing of white middle class liberals and feminists.

The British ruling class has institutionalised multiculturalism in order to maintain divisions within the working class and at the same time prevent the "social discontent" of black youth from getting out of control. A sizeable group of middle class blacks are employed to promote these policies and they owe their comfortable existence to this. These people are nothing but stooges

for capitalism and in one way or another are acting as cultural policemen in the various ethnic "communities".

So much for the progressive multiculturalists. At the end of the day they will prefer to side with Islamic reaction rather than see a struggle which threatens the existing set-up.

Totally opposed to this was the anti-racist action of black and white youth who fought shoulder to shoulder against the official police in the riots in Brixton, Toxteth, etc. in 1986. It is this kind of action which we support. This has nothing to do with the divisive social tinkering of the multiculturalists and everything to do with a united proletarian fight against the system which has created a worldwide class of exploited human beings whose interests go beyond the primitive boundaries of race and ethnicity promoted by the so-called progress-ives of capital's left wing.

THE REAGAN LEGACY: DEBT AND CRISIS

Reagan has retired to his ranch to feed the ducks. The 'Great Communicator' has gone off to commune with nature and has finally 'passed the buck' - in fact, near on a trillion of them in the form of the biggest pile of debt in capitalism's history. Over the course of the Reagan presidency the US has managed to eliminate the entire net investment position it had built up internationally since the First World War. At its present rate of increase total debt by the early 1990s will be nearly one-quarter of GNP. In 1986 foreign lending to the US permitted it to consume 4% more than it produced. A 2% reduction in consumption (to service interest alone) would be roughly equivalent to the 1981-2 recession, which was the deepest in the post-war period. A reduction of 6% (i.e. interest payments plus a halt to further lending) would have staggering implication for both the domestic US and the global economy.

Indications are that the glitz and extravagance of the Reagan '80s are on their way out. Bush has begun a campaign to weed out fraud among the Wall Street brokers - no less than 232 members of the Reagan administration were touched by sleaze in one way or another. Bush in fact is said to represent a political reassertion of the North Eastern Establishment against Reagan's constituency of the arriviste Sunbelt of the South and West. Are we seeing a political re-orientation of the US ruling class? Will 'Reaganism' survive the demise of Reagan? In order to make an anatomy of Reaganism it should be situated historically.

THE END OF US ECONOMIC HEGEMONY

It was above all the growth of the domestic US economy that provided a sustained momentum to the post-war world economy, allowing Europe and Japan to reconstruct their devastated productive forces on American mass assembly principles (Fordism). The US was only able to achieve this because its insertion into the world economy was uniquely asymmetrical; on the one hand its absolute contribution to world trade and investment was sufficiently large to generate dynamising demand and supply effects; on the other hand it was relatively autarchic compared to the rest of the OECD. Until 1970 only 8% of US GNP circulated on the world market. Unlike earlier imperial counterparts American hegemony was founded not on rigid pre-eminence in world trade or on hoardings of portfolio investments but on the maintenance of robust conditions of domestic accumulation.

Since its heydays in the '50s and '60s the US economy has been subject to the pressures of a growing internationalisation. The level of its GNP involved in world trade is 20% and growing. The global promotion of Fordism has impacted back on to the home industrial base leading to a series of import booms. Imports by value are now 14 times the 1970 level. General Motors' decision to retool with a 100 million dollars worth of Italian imports symbolises the growing breach in the formerly oligopolistic domestic industries integrated by auto production. Japan now owns vast chunks of corporate and real estate America which has had to cede ever larger shares of both the world and its domestic market to foreign competition. Nestle's purchase of Carnation - at \$3 billion the biggest non-oil deal in business history - was only one of a spate of acquisitions whereby foreign companies have acquired US based production facilities. Leading US manufacturers have simply become middlemen for the import invasion and formerly protected manufacturers have chosen the option of "leasing" part of their traditional market share e.g. GM's arrangement of "renting" the small car market to the Japanese.

The consumer durable industries and some of their primary suppliers have reacted to market saturation and foreign competition by undertaking the rationalisation of productive capacity. The historic originality of this process, however, is that it has taken the form of genuine "world industries". Allowing part of their domestic plant to rust away, multinationals have shifted amortization funds overseas to a strategic handful of export platforms. The result has been the emergence of integrated international assembly lines in auto, computer and pharmaceutical industries.

Tendencies have developed towards equalisation of income and productivity levels within the Fordist core of the world economy. By the late '70s there were indications that the upper levels of demand led by automobilisation and household mechanisation were being reached - (these have been extended only through massive extension of credit). The significance of this threshold for world capitalism, and specifically for the system of accumulation organised under the hegemony of the US, can be grasped by comparing it to the end of the great age of international rail construction under the aegis of British capitalism from 1905-12. Like this watershed which precipitated the economic malaise preceding the First World War, the end of Fordist type production has had profound structural consequences. The principal result has been to strengthen metropolitan finance and rentier interests at the expense of the productive economy.

THE "SUNBELT"

Since 1940 the rapid urbanisation of the pacific slope,

Texas and the non-cotton South has eroded the traditional metropolitan/ hinterland dichotomy and has shifted investment, urban population and income in such a way that by the end of the Vietnam War boom a Sunbelt urban-industrial region has emerged roughly equal in income and output to the old metropole, but distinguished by very different conditions of capital accumulation. Its economy is founded on the sectoral predominance of science based industries (aerospace, electronics), primary products and amenities (tourism, retirement and recreation), while the North still contains most of the older heavy and consumer durable industries. Mass production workers still constitute a crucial component of the "rustbelt" social structure, while the south and west are characterised by a more extreme segmentation of the labour force into technical-scientific professionals on the one hand and very low wage primary and tertiary sector workers on the other.

The Sunbelt is characterised by single family control (de facto and de jure) and an obsession with preserving financial and managerial independence; it is labour intensive, rabidly anti-union and anti-welfare. Entrepreneurial rather than corporate its interests are distinct from the transnational leviathans of the East and in contrast to the Old Right mid-western manufacturers with their protectionist internal market, the New Right capitalists are expansionist with particularly well defined interests in the Middle East and to some extent in Mexico and Central America. They are all deeply tied by a complex network of investments, and hidden shareholdings to land and mineral speculation and have realised enormous profits in commercial real estate markets and oil leases. They are a quasi-rentier bloc dependent on maintaining hot-house economic conditions and high growth rates and have overriding interests in ensuring - as was in the Reagan era - that federal transfer mechanisms e.g. defence spending, continues to disproportionately favour the Sunbelt states.

THE NEW CORPORATE ORDER

In tandem with the emergence of the New Right fraction, financial deregulation, by dismantling many of the New Deal structures which subordinated money-capital to productive-capital, has also stimulated the formation of a nouveau rentier class from within the old metropole. The percentage of personal income derived from interest has more than doubled under Reagan and by 1984 interest surpassed transfer payments for the first time since the New Deal, as the third largest income category. The current role of institutional investors (pension funds etc) in almost displacing private individuals, demonstrates the extent to which an autonomous rentier bloc has gained high ground within the economy. The result has been the erosion of long-term corporate investment horizons. Belying the role of "entrepreneurship" in the upturn after 1983, the volume of venture capital was a mere 1/60th of that involved in merger deals. The real momentum for expansion came from "services" responsible for the lion's share in growth and 85% of new job creation. As to new manufacturing investment, the trend has been towards job-displacing rationalisation.

The most significant tendency has been the remarkable tropism of manufacturing capital towards high profit sectors like energy reserves, financial services, real estate, emergent technology and above all defence. Formerly integrated manufacturing corporations have evolved into diversified, super-holding companies, dominated by speculative financial strategies. This has been paralleled by the predatory pursuit of other companies' assets - "paper entrepreneurialism" - the rearrangement of industrial assets in the hope of short term gains. The Reagan "recovery" brought merger mania to a fever pitch with \$398 billion swallowed in this form of cannibalism - (equivalent to the GNP of Italy). Only the arms race, itself a vast drain on the real economy, provided the impetus in the recovery of key industrial sectors, supplying half the increased demand in aerospace and a fifth in primary and fabricated metals. As new military technologies go into production over the next decade, the electronics content of defence spending, it is estimated, will increase by 30%. For the old "Fordist" core of the US economy, the Pentagon has been their lifeline and chief instrument of restructuring. For example, Goodyear is actively cannibalising its tyre production to shift into military aerospace. Both Ford and GM derive an important part of their cashflow from billion dollar Pentagon contracts.

TERTIARISATION

An unusually large middle strata and a plethora of people in "contradictory class locations" has been one of the salient features of the 20th Century American social landscape. What is new is the way in which the "tertiarisation" of the economy has been harnessed to the distributive advantage of an expanded managerial-professional stratum as well as opening new frontiers of accumulation for small and medium sized businesses. At the same time the Fordist circuitry of regular wage productivity agreements, which used to ensure the channeling of part of the social surplus back into the expansion of real wages and so to the upgrading of labour power, is beginning to break down. With the growth of part

time work and the black economy, the US proletariat is more and more subject to norms of absolute exploitation. Credit, not the growth of the real wage, has become the principal motor of private consumption.

In the US by the beginning of the 1980s the new middle class (salaried) of professionals, managers, technocrats etc, comprised nearly 25% of the workforce, a higher proportion of any other OECD country except Sweden. Of course it is necessary to take into account the special position of the US in the international division of labour, as the headquarters of so much transnational production and of the unusually large scale of its research and higher education

establishments. Nevertheless few comparative statistics are so striking as the apparent hypertrophy of occupations in the US associated with the supervision of labour, the organisation of capital and the implementation of the sales effort. In per capita terms the US is monumentally overstaffed with line managers and foremen (twice as many as Germany), salesmen (two and a half times as many as France), and lawyers (25 times as many as Japan). Of the 3.6 million manufacturing jobs added to the US economy since 1948, 3 million were filled by non-production employees. Although "blue-collar" employment has fallen by 12% since the onset of the 1980 recession, by 1983 there were nearly 9% more managers and administrators.

Private sector tertiary employment was concentrated disproportionately in three areas: health care, business services and fast food (MacDonald's alone now employs more than the entire basic US steel industry). Each of these three areas reveal combinations of low-wage employment with middle strata political "subsidies" - various forms of tax relief etc. Meanwhile, the old middle class in the US has been given a new lease of life under Reagan. A vast bloated middle class, traditional and salaried, presents a formidable problem for a communist American proletariat, not least because of its considerable political energy.

Tertiarisation is not some "natural" process but stems from the adaptation of US industry to new conditions of internationalised production, where world demand is ultimately constrained by the class relations of the semi-periphery. At the same time there have been created conditions of 'extra-economic coercion of masses of disorganised workers subject to menialisation and super-exploitation in the luxuriant growth of small businesses geared to the "affluent" market. In the tertiary sector there has been a politically encouraged stratification of occupational categories that disqualifies and deskills the majority of workers to the advantage of a credential or managerial minority. In the US with a quiescent working class, falling real wages and with small relative increases in state spending much of the problem of the corporate profitability and of the fiscal crisis of the state is due to the success of the economic and political offensives of the new managerial, entrepreneurial and rentier strata. In this sense there has been a salary-and-rent "squeeze" on profits. However, since the latter are ultimately derived from the former i.e. from the extraction of surplus value from living, productive labour, there is a limit to how long this form of parasitism can continue without producing serious economic tensions.

POLITICAL PROSPECTS

On the surface there appears to have been a smooth transfer of political power from one tired old Republican president to his successor. But, given the new situation of global economic rivalry in which Bush will have to operate, powerful latent contradictions are bound to express themselves sooner or later - between big capital and the expanded middle strata, between the goods-producing and the service producing sectors, between financial and productive capital, between the various strata of the working class and the fractions of capital which require to turn the screws even tighter.

Although the rhetoric of the various campaigns and tax rebellions that paved Reagan's road to power was vigorously anti-statist, the real programmatic intention was towards a restructuring rather than a diminution of state spending and intervention in order to expand the frontiers of entrepreneurial and rentier activity. Under Bush there is likely to be a further lean towards a purely political regulation of the business cycle, such as even the Democrats never dared. Bush, however, will have to grasp the nettle that Reagan pretended never existed.

Reaganism was an attempt to preserve the entire structure of property values and capitalisation accumulated by the bourgeoisie, the middle strata and more privileged strata of the working class built up over the last 30 years or so. It was a popular front against the depreciation of inefficient fixed capital and the deflation of speculative equity, an uneasy congruence of interests between fractions of capital, the insurgent middle strata, and a fragment, declining in political influence, of the working class. As such it was capital and the middle strata with their commitment to a "supply-side" programme of expansion. Reaganism in

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RUSSIA: REVOLUTION AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION

THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL 70 YEARS AGO

THE FOUNDING OF THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL

The seventieth anniversary of the foundation of the Third (Communist) International occurs during the life of this issue of Workers Voice so we are devoting this issue to that part of the history of the Bolshevik Revolution concerning international questions.

The most important legacy of Bolshevism is its internationalism. No other party AS A PARTY translated internationalism in words into deeds. Sponsors of the Stuttgart and Basle resolutions against war at the international gatherings of the Socialist International before the war, they alone stood out from the beginning of the war for international revolution. Whilst the parties of the Second International either found spurious and shameful reasons to support their "own" governments' war efforts or, went in for a feeble pacifism, the Bolsheviks from the beginning called for the defeat of their own government and international civil war. No other party or group could match this proletarian record. Many Mensheviks, prompted by the anti-war consciousness of the Russian working class did oppose the war from an internationalist standpoint, but once the Tsar was overthrown they threw in their support for the bourgeois provisional government of Kerensky. The anarchists' anti-war message was mainly of a pacifist nature whilst their most famous Russian representative, Kropotkin shamelessly supported the Tsarist war effort.

At the Zimmerwald and Kienthal socialist conferences held in Switzerland against the war it was the Bolsheviks who were the only substantial party to adhere to the "Left" which seceded from the pacifist majority. This was consciously seen by Lenin as the first step in the creation of a new international which would adhere to the Marxist principle of international class solidarity and which would be in a position to lead the coming international revolution. That was in 1915 and 1916.

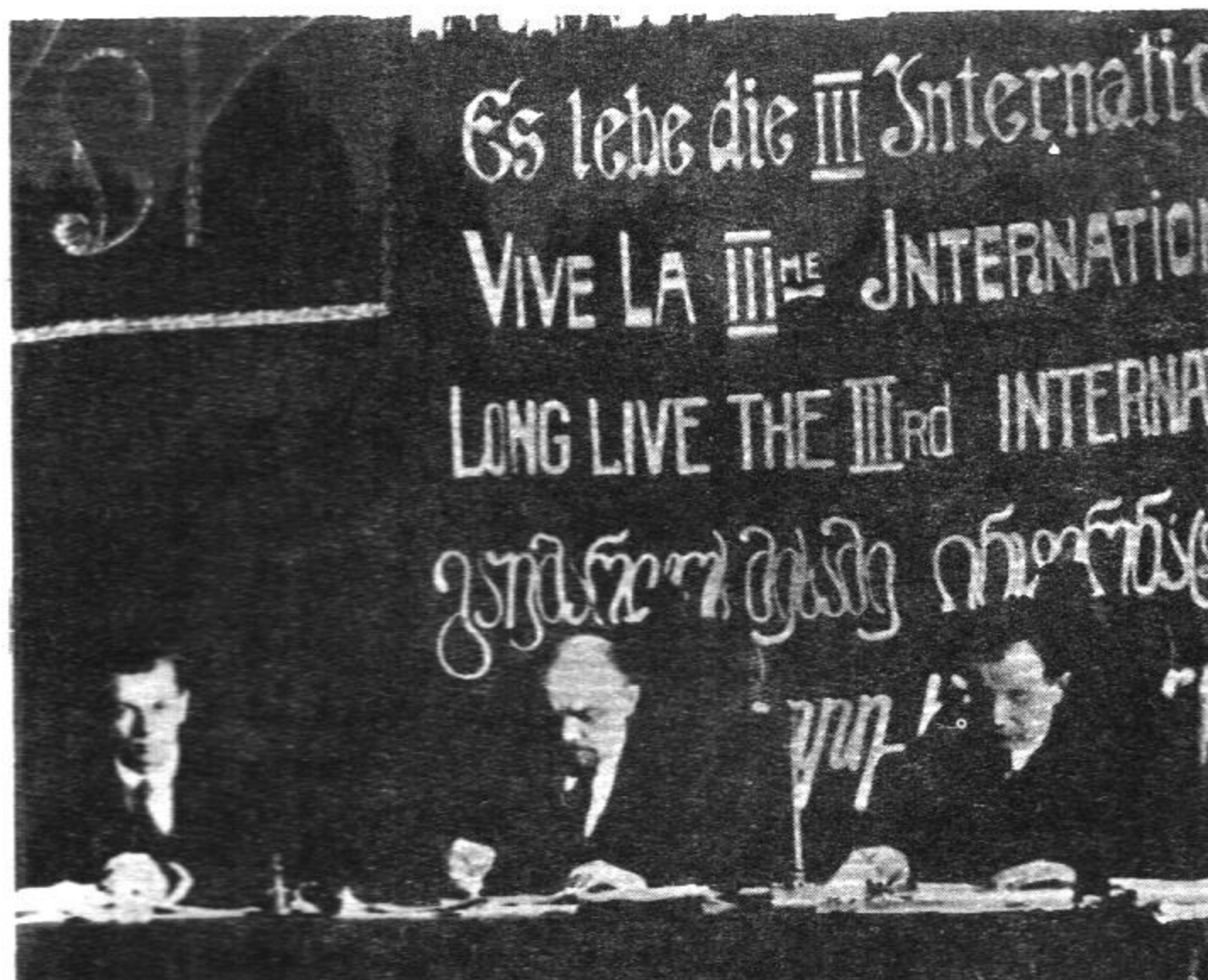
In 1917 the April Theses which Lenin proposed to the Bolsheviks were not simply concerned with the the situation inside Russia. Take this example;

"Much is given to the Russian proletariat; nowhere in the world has the working class yet succeeded in developing so much revolutionary energy as in Russia. But to whom much is given, of him much is required.

The Zimmerwald bog can no longer be tolerated. We must not, for the sake of the Zimmerwald "Kautskyites", continue the smei-alliance with the chauvinist International of the Plekhanovs and Schiedemanns. We must break with this international immediately... It is we who must found, and right now, without delay, a NEW, revolutionary proletarian International, or rather we must not fear to acknowledge publicly that this new International is ALREADY ESTABLISHED and operating."

(THE TASKS OF THE PROLETARIAT IN OUR REVOLUTION V.I. Lenin Selected Works Vol. 2 pp. 57-8)

The same internationalism in deed was evident in the debates around both the seizure of power in November 1917 and the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918. In both cases the debate within the Bolshevik Party was marked by a great concern for the situation of the Russian working class within the prospect for world revolution. Those, like Volodarsky, who urged delay in the seizure of power did so because they believed that the international revolution was not close enough (See WV37). Lenin's opponents over Brest-Litovsk argued, on the other hand that international revolution was very close



Lenin attends the opening of the First Congress of the Comintern

but would be set back by the signing of the Treaty with German imperialism (See WV39). Time and again Bolshevik leaders repeated Lenin's words of March 1918 that "Without the German Revolution we are doomed".

THE FIRST CONGRESS OF THE COMINTERN

Such was the background to the First Congress of the Third (Communist) International in March 1919. Actually this first congress was hardly representative of the growing revolutionary movement in the post-war world. The so-called "civil war" which was, in reality, a war against all the imperialist powers, had so isolated Russia that assembling delegates to represent the proletariat of every country was impossible. In practice many international communists who had already made their way to Russia "represented" national areas for which they had no formal mandate.

However two events had made the calling of the Third International more imperative than ever. In the first place the Spartakusbund of Germany had finally overcome its hesitations and broken with the Social Democratic Party to form a Communist Party in December 1918. In the second place the Second International, which had collapsed as a result of its constituent parties enthusiasm for their own governments in the war was reconstituting itself as a workers' international at Berne in March 1919. It could not be allowed to perpetuate the lie that it represented the international working class.

Not surprisingly, the First Congress of the Third International was a makeshift affair. Every effort was made to maintain the internationalist spirit of Bolshevism (e.g. the language of the Congress was German) but the fact that many of the delegates could not get to Moscow (the Italian and British socialists were not represented) meant that the Third International was from the beginning dominated by the Russian section. This in itself was not a problem so long as the world revolution was going forward. The Russian Communist Party (as the Bolsheviks had called themselves since March 1918) themselves recognised the danger but assumed that the world revolution was only a matter of months away and the seat of the Third International would soon be moved somewhere to the West.

The early optimism of the Third International (henceforth referred to as the Comintern) had plenty of justification. Although the Spartakist rising had been crushed in January and the German KPD leaders Luxemburg and Leibknecht murdered by soldiers acting for the German Socialist Party, Soviet republics were set up in Hungary and Vienna in that year whilst Turin, Clydeside and many

other places in Europe seemed to be seething with revolution.

However the International was already beset by problems. The most significant of these was the split in the German party engineered by Rosa Luxemburg's lawyer Paul Levi. The Left of the KPD were opposed to work in Parliament and the old SPD trade unions and wished to try to build on the organisations which had come out of the German Revolution in November 1918. Levi however, was already aiming at a regroupment with the "centrist" USPD which was rapidly becoming the largest section of the old German SDP. Thus the Left were told that if they did not accept the decision on the question of Parliamentarism and trades unions then they would be expelled. This is precisely what happened at the Heidelberg Conference despite the attempts of the Comintern to prevent it. Henceforth the Comintern was faced by two Communist parties in Germany, the KPD of Levi and the KAPD (Communist Workers' Party of Germany).

THE SECOND COMINTERN CONGRESS

This met in Moscow in July and August of 1920. It can be considered the beginning of the Communist International proper since it was much more representative of the European and world working class. The primary question on the agenda was how to prevent the centrist elements of the old Socialist parties from entering the Third International and thus watering down its revolutionary aims. The Russians proposed 19 conditions which were aimed at "a complete and absolute break with reformism and 'centrist politics'". (Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Communist International, Inklink p.94). At the Congress itself two further conditions were added. The most important was that of Bordiga, with the left delegates of the Italian Socialist Party. Faced with an intransigent right wing under Turati and a devious and large centrist tendency under Serrati, Bordiga wanted to make it impossible for the issue to be fudged. The Centrists in the Italian party would therefore be compelled to choose between the Second and Third Internationals. The 21st condition therefore adopted was that

"Those party members who fundamentally reject the conditions and theses laid down by the Communist International are to be expelled from the Party.

The same will apply particularly to the delegates to the special Party Congress" (op. cit p.97)

These 21 Conditions confirmed the split with the Second International, not only in political but also in organisational terms. Against the loose and amorphous nature of the Second International the Third International was to be centralised so that the decisions of the Congress and of the Executive Committee (ECCI) were binding on all member parties. The unfortunate effect of the 21 conditions was that it also kept out many left wing elements such as the British shop stewards movement, the IWW and the KAPD although it was recognised that most of them were "profoundly proletarian" and stood "on the root ground of the principles of the Communist International" (Lenin). Communists were thus urged to unite with them wherever possible.

The Second Congress was the high point of the Communist International since it came at a time "when the Russian revolution seemed most certainly on the point of transforming itself into the European revolution, with the destinies of the RSFSR merged in with those of some broader European unit. No-one was more interested in this consummation than the Russian Bolsheviks, who still implicitly believed that their own salvation depended on

The first two Congresses of the Comintern because they complete the break with the practices and policies of the Second International thus represent the starting point for the formation of a future international workers' party. This single point alone separates the tradition of the Communist Left to which we in the International Bureau adhere from that of the Trotskyist and quasi-Trotskyists who adhere to the decisions of the first FOUR Congresses of the Comintern. Let us explain by looking more closely at the history of the Comintern.

THE DOWNTURN

The high hopes of revolution at the Second Congress diminished after the 1921 March Action in Germany was defeated. This was the last time a sizeable section of the working class launched armed struggle against the bourgeoisie in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. The question that now arose was what could a revolutionary international do in a non-revolutionary situation?

As Trotsky clearly saw of the situation in 1919, "the proletariat of Europe could undoubtedly have conquered state power with the minimum of sacrifices, had there been at its head a genuine revolutionary organisation, setting forth clear aims and capably pursuing them, i.e. a strong Communist Party" ("The Main Lesson of the Third Congress", 1921). This was all very true. It was the slowness of the likes of Luxemburg and the failure of the likes of Serrati to break with the reactionary Social democrats that ensured these defeats. The Communist Parties had, in the main, been formed AFTER the revolutionary events which they should have taken the lead. But what lessons did the Third International draw from this?

In the debate on communist tactics at the Third Congress of the Communist International in June-July 1921 it was now stated that the Communist Parties had been successful in following the lead of the Second Congress. They had managed to form themselves on a relatively clear basis without any concessions to the principles of Social Democracy. However this success was now posited as a failure since the majority of the Communist parties, although often quite large, were not mass parties and "To the Masses" was "the main slogan which the Third Congress transmits to the Communists of the World" (Theses, etc op. cit. p.300). At the same time the tactic of working in reactionary trades unions was further confirmed and Communist Parties were instructed for its members to form "a united proletarian front" within the unions. These were in fact the first steps that the ECCI took towards the proclamation of the "united front" in December 1921 and which was confirmed by the Fourth Congress in 1922.

Thus the message that the Comintern sent out to the European proletariat was that the Social Democrats who had supported imperialism in World War One and had massacred the communist leaders in Germany were now not so bad after all.

Nowhere was Comintern policy more confused than over the trades unions. Communists were told to work in the existing unions with the aim of conquering their leadership in order to build a possible mass basis for the Communist Party. However the Third Congress also set up a Red Trade Union International in direct competition with the existing trades union international (the IFTU) dominated by the Second International. To which body was the communist worker in the reactionary trades union to adhere?

But this wasn't the only inconsistency. If the revolutionary wave was in retreat as the Comintern (and all its constituent parties) agreed, why was it necessary to build mass parties at all? The Bolsheviks, as was often pointed out at the time, had hardly been a mass party at the start of 1917. But they did exist as a separate and distinct force around which the proletariat could regroup as the revolutionary crisis deepened. There was at the time an equation of the size of the European Communist Parties with their lack of a working class base or a sectarian failing

to find means of extending the Party's support within the class. But this did not always follow.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF ITALY

Most of these points were astutely made at the time by the leaders of the Communist Party of Italy which was created at Livorno (Leghorn) in February 1921 under the leadership of Amadeo Bordiga. Bordiga had been a revolutionary defeatist in World War One without having read a word of Lenin, he had been warning the Gramsci faction of Ordine Nuovo of the need to conquer the state as well as the Turin factories at exactly the same time as Lenin was and had been the most consistent supporter of the Russian Revolution in Italy. The Communist Party of Italy which his faction led is thus worthy of serious study in any history of the Comintern. However any group which had claim to revolutionary traditions before Trotskyism is of course anathema to the Trotskyists. Hence the Trotskyist school of falsification has wasted few words (and these were dismissive) on the Communist Party of Italy.

Take, as example, the following piece from a book on "The Comintern" by the SWP hack, Duncan Hallas,

"...the dominant force in the new Communist Party were the supporters of Amadeo Bordiga. Imposing as a man of iron principle, Bordiga was also an unbendable ultra-left dogmatist. His faction in the PSI had originally been formed on the basis of abstention from parliamentary elections on principle. He had condemned the Turin factory councils as 'economistic'. Now he was to be absolutely opposed to any united front with the Socialist Party

It was not until the mid-1920s that the hold of the ultra-lefts on the PCI (sic) was finally broken. By then it was too late. Fascism had triumphed." (op. cit p. 61)

And that is the only reference he makes to the Italian Party until the abandonment of the united front at the Fifth Congress in 1923. Let us say first of all that hardly a sentence of the above is true. Hallas can't even get the name of the Italian Party right. It was deliberately called the Partito Comunista of Italy (CP d'I), to show it was part of the international communist movement which happened to be located in Italy. The more nationalist name was only adopted once the party was stalinised after the Left were ousted by bureaucratic manoeuvres on the part of the Comintern in the later 1920s. Secondly the Left of the PSI were not abstentionist on principle but as a tactic. They equated parliamentary activity with the corrupt right-wing of the PSI and hoped that by calling for abstentionism they would split the PSI to form a Communist Party. This was a mistake since it only confused many would-be communists but it was not a principle. The CP of Italy

participated in parliamentary elections on a revolutionary basis and in trades unions. They also tried to carry out the Comintern decision on the united front in practice but continued to argue against it at Congresses. Finally the victory of fascism was assured not by the intransigence of the CP of Italy but because the workers had already been defeated in 1919-20. Fascism triumphed as a result of that defeat, it did not bring about that defeat.

The important issue remains about how to conduct a retreat. To call for going 'to the masses' at a time of reflux was a short-term and mistaken tactic which only convinced many workers that the Communists were either unprincipled or that their criticisms of Social Democracy were not really serious. Lenin's injunctions in "Left Wing Communism - An Infantile Disorder" "to resort to every trick, cunning, illegal expedient, concealment, suppression of the truth, in order to penetrate into the trade unions" also gave the bourgeoisie in the various capitalist countries the ammunition to point to the treacherous and devious nature of the Comintern. For the Trotskyists however the idea of criticising any action of Lenin or Trotsky is unthinkable. They do not recognise that the essence of being Marxist and Leninist is to use marxism as a method to continuously re-examine proletarian actions in order to arrive at the correct strategy and tactics for the future. This means that we must have a critical and not an adulatory attitude towards our own history. The Russian Revolution did not achieve what it did out of nowhere. In Russia the workers had learned directly from the experience of the failed revolution of 1905 and indirectly via their class party, the Bolsheviks, of the lessons of the Paris Commune.

But after 1917 the workers of Russia and Europe entered into a new epoch, "the epoch of the decay of capitalism" as a social system. No-one could draw any lessons from the past to help them since there never had been a situation when the working class in so many countries came close to revolution at a single period. Nor were there any lessons for them in dealing with the situation in which a proletarian revolution had occurred in one country but, after four years of struggle, the world revolution had not come to its aid. It is our task today to subject these experiences to critical examination and to draw up the lessons for the future.

THE LESSONS OF THE COMINTERN EXPERIENCE

Far from being a bunch of unbending dogmatists, or a group of mere intellectuals, the leaders of the Communist Party of Italy recognised the need for a wide range of tactics. Take for example these extracts drawn up at the PC d'I's Second Congress held in Rome in 1922

"Communists will never refuse to take part in the struggles of proletarian economic bodies, even when they are led by socialists, syndicalists or even anarchists, unless, of course, the whole working class spontaneously rebels against such activity" (Thesis 19);

"When the conditions which the Communist Party has at its disposal for a tactical action which could be defined as DIRECT (from the viewpoint of an assault on bourgeois power) don't exist, the party, far from restricting its activity to a pure and simple task of propaganda and proselytism, can and must exercise its influence over events, through its relations with and pressures on other parties and political and social movements, tending to force the situation to develop favourably towards its own goals, and in a manner which hastens the moment when resolute revolutionary action will be possible" (Thesis 31)

(From "The Rome Theses" REVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVES 22, pp26-27 (This, the only English translation of the Theses is available from the CWO price £1 P&P)

However the tactics of the Comintern were erroneous (the united front was greeted with derision by the Social Democratic parties) and the tactics wavered too frequently. In 1920 the all out offensive was proclaimed to be replaced by doing deals with the socialists in 1921-2. This tactic was hastily abandoned for further denunciation of

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REVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVES

22



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Theoretical Journal of the Communist Workers Organisation

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THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL 70 YEARS AGO

the Second International parties in 1923. As Bordiga asked "what was a worker to make of all these changes of policy?"

Tactics are essential if a proletarian organisation is create the best possible opportunity for its ideas to defeat the deadweight of bourgeois ideology. But tactics are not tricks. The greatest weapon in the struggle for communism is class consciousness. This cannot be forged by anything less than a clear appeal to class aims and interests. The Trotskyists, those heirs of the united front (so much so that Trotsky called for his followers to enter the Second International parties in the 1930's - and many of them are still there) have discredited themselves too often to deny the truth of this assertion. The antics of the Militant tendency in the Labour Party being only the latest propaganda coup for the bourgeoisie.

Tactics also have to be related to the specific cultural, historical and political situation of the proletariat in any given area. The Comintern, in its desire to avoid the federalism of the Second International over-reacted and produced a series of tactics which were too rigid. The policy of the offensive or the idea of working at the base with workers in economic organisations related to the Second International was not universally applicable. The Russian party also came to see itself as holding up model for others to follow. But the model they gave was in the preparation of the Russian proletariat in the years before 1917. They expected Western parties to perform the same task overnight.

Nor were the Western parties faced by such an effete bourgeoisie as that which had confronted the Russians. Lenin's advice to the British communists to work within the Labour Party betrayed a total lack of understanding of the difference between that party and the social democratic parties on the continent. The Labour Party was a vote catching machine for the trades union bureaucracy and had never pretended to be "socialist".

But one other problem which arose during the decline of the Third International was the question of the relationship of the International to the already liberated proletarian area. In 1921 the British, without giving political recognition to the Soviet state signed a trade agreement which called for a suspension of Bolshevik propaganda towards the colonies of the British Empire. Sure enough, against the denunciations of the Indian Communist M.N. Roy, the Third Congress of the Comintern dropped its specific attacks on the British imperialists. As Roy said this was "opportunism" of the most blatant kind. Although it did not spell the end of the International it was the beginning of a severe decline. As the world revolution retreated the prestige of the RSFSR increased in the International. The Russian CP's domination over the International increased and though opposition continued to be tolerated there was a growing interference with the tactics and personnel of the affiliated parties. In short the Third International had become simply another arm of the developing Russian state capitalist bureaucracy long before the 1920s was over.

There can be no legislation against the repetition of such a course if a similar circumstance where one area is liberated and isolated. What we, as internationalist communists must do to prevent such a recurrence is to ensure that the next international is founded on strong political and organisational footings in advance of the next revolutionary wave.

Learning the lessons of the demise of the Third International is an essential part of that process.

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REAGAN LEGACY

an impossibility built on the illusion that expansion could be insured indefinitely by shifting the costs on to foreign capitalists, on to masses of the newly marginalised poor, on to the periphery (or on to the "Third World" within the US - the Sunbelt's vast reserve army of labour, a virtual Bantustan of Mexican and Central American immigrants).

Unlike in 1981 when virtually the whole burden of "Reaganomics" could be loaded on to the working poor, the fiscal and budgetary battles of 1985 had to presume some cutbacks from the "Haves" bloc itself. In particular the struggle between promoters of tax "simplification" and the partisans of deficit reduction at all cost could be interpreted as the beginning of a divergence between the nouveau riche and the corporate wings of Reaganism. Bush WILL have to reduce the deficit if US capitalism is going to resuscitate itself. Precisely who is going to suffer is the basis of his agenda.

The dangers pursued by the Reagan strategy of super-exploitation are that it has artificially prolonged the life of non-competitive capitals. The absence of powerful defensive responses from the working class will probably make the internecine battles between capital even more violent. One might imagine that Bush will take a few leaves out of the notebook of Thatcherism which has been a far more politically coherent bloc than Reagan's loaded deck of New Rightists, Cold War vigilantes and uneasy members of the Eastern Establishment and which at least has imposed a discipline of deferred gratification on sections of the middle class in its drive to devalorize unproductive and noncompetitive capital.

Despite renewed efforts by the Bush administration to come to terms with the budget deficit, caution is the order of the day as there is the growing view that Draconian action to deal with the problem could be "counterproductive", i.e. could precipitate a recession. With short term interest rates rising in Europe and the US, the US trade deficit worsening and inflation showing signs of surging, the financial markets have been looking to the Group of Seven February session to provide fresh initiatives. It is very likely that the pace at which the crisis in the capital markets develops will determine - leaving aside international crises or domestic explosions - the timing of the unavoidable collision within the Bush coalition between core capital with its need for economic stabilisation, and the right wing populists (representing both peripheral

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REPORT FROM FRANCE

struggle. All this, so that we will say: "So there is an opposition force in France; a union which can struggle and win: the CGT!" This is the simple moral they would like us to draw from the whole episode.

CONCLUSION

It's always possible to comment on the reasons for the CGT's coming forward to settle accounts with the Socialists who are in power by pointing to the union's (necessary) attempt to reconquer its base amongst the workers after the deep disappointment with joint Socialist-Communist rule between 1981 and 1984 which led to catastrophic election results for the CP (less than 10% of recent votes). These factors certainly entered into it but such calculations are only of marginal interest to us. The most important fact which revolutionaries must carefully consider is that twenty years after May '68 the problems facing the working class are substantially the same. Capitalism's crisis has developed, severely affecting the conditions of existence of the workers. The latter have reacted, but in a disjointed and uneven fashion. Each time the trade union organisations (even though sometimes a little late in the day) have succeeded in containing these reactions within boundaries compatible with the needs of capital. They have been able to jump ahead of the workers and, in their own way, call for struggle when (as we have seen lately) it is developing of its own accord but where the discontent is slow in articulating itself and making itself felt.

They have also lost troops in the battle (haemorrhage of militants) but they have also replenished their forces (including after these latest strikes, e.g. the CGT has recently made advances in Renault, it has enrolled new members in the Post Office ...)

Thus it would be premature to dismiss the unions or to underestimate their ability to adapt to new situations. If they have survived successfully for so long by playing the same game of moderating the fundamental

historical retrospect may well come to be seen as really dysfunctional to the operation of the US capitalist state as it is bound, having raised unsustainable expectations, to unleash new furies of resentment against a system which cannot deliver the advertised miracles. The assumption that the coming crisis of Sunbelt affluence will turn the "Me Generation" to the "Left" i.e. towards old guard liberalism, is unfounded. Relentlessly conditioned by Reaganomics to expect prosperity as their "divine right", the software aristocracy and the boutique bourgeoisie might well be radicalised towards the far right. In a depression shattered boom economy a declassé petty bourgeoisie may well become the embodiment of what Upton Sinclair warned against in the '30s: "the Californazis".



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demands of the working class this is also because the system in which they are integrated - and of which they are a mainstay - is still managing to soften class distinctions and defer and dilute the most negative aspects of the crisis which grips it.

All the basic reference points of the working class (ideology, political parties, programme, organisation) have been broken through dozens of years of domination by the counter-revolution. The working class has still not recovered from this terrible defeat. It hasn't yet found a way beyond these hesitant struggles to be able to discern the multiplicity and complexity of the methods of domination applied by the system in which it finds itself ensnared. Its experiences have been too partial to allow it to establish itself firmly on the terrain of its own class autonomy - in opposition to the ideologies and organisations which are the vehicle for perpetuating the exploitation of the working class. Other, wider, deeper and more intense battles will occur where each of the two opposing camps: bourgeoisie and proletariat, will be forced to reveal more of their true identity and thus expose themselves more directly to the blows of the other.

It is not for us to predict the particular ups and downs of the class confrontations which are in store but what we can affirm here and now is that the tasks which lie ahead for the political vanguard derive their significance from today. A victorious outcome to the revolution depends on the capacity of revolutionaries to put themselves at the head of actual battles, including the early ones, and on their leading the practical, political, theoretical and organisational struggle for the rearming of the working class.

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THE LESSONS STILL HAVE TO BE LEARNED

Recent events in France have demonstrated both the readiness to fight on the part of a number of sectors of the working class and at the same time the capacity of the bourgeoisie's political and trade union organisations to manipulate and take over the struggle. In a general sense it is true that there hasn't been a situation like this since 1968 - with various sectors (transport, social services, administrative workers, postal workers) moving at the same time. Yet all of this has amounted to no more than a juxtaposition of sectional struggles which have never escaped the limitations of a particular firm or industry. Thus the various, often weak flickers of struggle, didn't burst out into a more widespread fire which would have encouraged other sectors to join. As we will see below, responsibility for such dispersal cannot simply be placed on the trade unions. This weakness is also the product of the wider relationship between capital and labour - a relationship which has been consolidated over decades - and the immense variety of methods used by the bourgeoisie to dominate the whole of society. Nothing could be more dangerous than to believe that a breach in the trade union barrage would open up a spontaneous wave of unified class struggle. In France, as everywhere else, the working class still has to relearn how to wage a united struggle on its own class terrain - that is, independently of the interests of a particular firm or the national economy. A return to such elementary practice is the condition for a better understanding of the kinds of weaknesses and obstacles which have been so markedly revealed over recent weeks in France. Despite a string of conflicts from the beginning of October to the end of December, strikes were less militant than certain sectional outbursts in the past (like the steelworkers in 1979 or 1984, naval dockyard workers in 1985) and the bourgeoisie was well-prepared for the situation. At no time did the Rocard government have to consider a substantial reappraisal either of its economic aims or its wages policy. And, above all, we have seen the unleashing of the media as never before against "the strikes which won't end". Thus a climate has been created which has encouraged a more general debate the outcome of which could be limitations on the right to strike in the Civil Service (provision of a "minimum service"), enforced by means of all the available juridical and legislative arsenal. But before coming to the final outcome, let's take a retrospective look at the events themselves - the preliminary steps, their progression and concluding stages during the final days of December.

DISTURBANCE IN THE SPRING

The first foretaste of what was to come were the strikes which continued throughout the whole period of the presidential elections. This in itself was rare and, in the eyes of the bourgeoisie, at the very least sacrilege. So, while the worshippers of capital were inviting the "citizens" to prostrate themselves at the feet of democracy, the workers of SNECMA (aeroplane engines) were pursuing their own battle for a wage rise and drawing in their wake other workers from the aeronautical sector. At the same time Michelin workers (tyres), not just in Clermont Ferrand, the most important factory in the group, but also less significant centres, such as Bourges, Tours, Le Puy were involved in the fight to reject the derisory 20 centimes per hour wage increase offered by management. (In France 20 centimes is half the price of a box of matches! In other words, nothing.) The strike was destined to last through both rounds of the presidential election, bringing with it a realistic atmosphere in sharp contrast to the caricature speeches of the politicians.

The same issue of wages and working

conditions prompted a struggle by Chausson workers (commercial vehicles) which went on to last more than a fortnight.

The fact that workers were obliged to have recourse to open struggle again in order to obtain meagre material concessions - much less than their original demands - is not in itself anything to worry about. The positive aspect still holds that the social truce was broken throughout the period of the electoral orgy, just as it had been by the railway drivers during the New Year celebrations in the winter of 1986-87. This alone signifies a lot. Whatever their weaknesses and limitations, these struggles opened a way which other sections of the working class were quick to follow.

A SUMMER LESS PEACEFUL THAN EXPECTED

Summer in France is traditionally a period of social calm from which the bourgeoisie is able to profit. Thus, last summer the bourgeoisie brought in rent and tax increases (on gas, electricity and transport). At the same time, however, an observer could have noticed a flurry of new ideas and discussions passing through a number of sectors of the working class. These were taken up and developed by the CGT (the main, CP-dominated trade union confederation) which quickly announced that things were hotting up on the social scene. The discontent accumulated over many years was perceptible and though it was finding it hard to define itself in practice it was clear (and this was understood by the most conservative fractions of the bourgeoisie) that the day of reckoning could not be postponed for ever. The Rocard government, anxious to "preserve the general equilibrium" and hostile to any wage freeze, finished up disillusioning those few optimists who still hoped for a slight improvement after the period of Chirac's hardships.

In the health service discussions and meetings were well underway, largely under the control of Trotskyist militants who prepared and organised the strike movement of the nurses in September.

By taking up again some of the characteristic aspects of the 1986 SNCF (railway) strike (organising in coordination committees more or less on the margins of the unions) the nurses' movement came to be the starting point for a torrent of strikes which affected the public sector above all others: the Postal Service, Social Security, Family Income Support (Caisses d'Allocations Familiales) and transport (RATP in Paris, metro and bus routes in various provincial towns). Despite some significant internal weaknesses and divisions the nurses' strike was highly organised and centralised (hemmed-in even) and led to substantial wage increases: between 10 and 15 per cent, depending on job category. It was the

government's fear of seeing the movement spread that led it to submit to the nurses' demands before it extended any further: the old principle of divide and rule.

THE PUBLIC SECTOR STRIKE

The movement in the public sector was much more incoherent and dispersed than in the health service. The strikes went through highs and lows, interruptions and revivals, until the end of December. All of them revolved round problems which are common to the whole of today's working class (wages, working conditions) yet in each struggle the union organisations (essentially the CGT) succeeded in drowning the class demands in a hodge-podge of limited sectional complaints and thereby kept each battle contained within a particular sector. For example, in the Post Office strike the CGT brought up particularities of the van drivers' demands in contrast to the demands of workers in the affected sorting offices and the delivery men. This made the drivers totally passive during the strike in the sorting offices so they didn't begin their action until the day after the return to work by the sorting offices in the Paris region. The same is true on the geographical level. There was no coordination of strike action: when a strike finished in Lille it started in Paris, then when it came to a halt there Lyons and Bordeaux were affected; when this exhausted itself it was the turn of Marseilles to enter the fray.

Thus, if the first impression from outside was of a widespread strong movement, it could very quickly be perceived that appearances are misleading. In fact disorganisation and disorientation reigned supreme. Union directives and initiatives (often the source of a strike) met little opposition, mainly because the majority of workers still believe that the CGT is an 'honest broker' and represents the genuine translator of their discontent. The CGT agitated for large wage increases: the prime demand - for form's sake, because on the ground at grass roots level it passed its time organising interminable negotiations with the local bosses over minor problems followed by ritual votes where workers were asked to pronounce 'democratically' for or against. From the start, therefore, the union trapped the strike in the logic of limited negotiations which only helped to undermine any potential for a more general struggle based on demands common to everyone. In place of solidarity, the CGT was content to organise 'sounding-out' ballots where workers were asked to voice individually their "priorities for the moment" but without translating this into any concrete action. Thus, certain Post Office sorting offices where workers had voted 100% in favour of resolutions for wage increases didn't even go on strike for a day!

The same situation and strategy existed in the transport strike. While Nantes, Lyons and St. Etienne were paralysed for three weeks by a bus drivers' and metro workers' strike in Paris it was dead calm and the CGT - who called the tune locally - was careful not to add fuel to the flames in the capital (each in his turn, and there'll be a turn for everyone!) At the SNCF (railways) the CGT kept quiet and gave no instructions to strike. Instead it kept talking about days of action to begin in January because, according to the union, a new strike at the end of the year (as in 1986) would be "viewed badly" by sacrosanct public opinion. Then, just as the provincial return to work got underway the CGT called for a metro and transport workers' strike in Paris. Since it has more influence in the maintenance and repair shops the CGT managed to clog up the traffic on some of the main traffic routes. All this was too much for the bourgeoisie who now unleashed the full force of its propaganda to try and mount the "transport users" against the strikers. And just as the anti-strike hysteria had reached its height, when calm was virtually restored in the other sectors, the government called on army vehicles to ensure there was transport for the poor employees and young office workers who were dying to get back to their workplaces or their shabby suburban lodgings. So now there is nothing more to add. The bourgeoisie had regained control of the situation. The CGT protested to anyone who wanted to listen that it wasn't the only party at fault, that it still had some weapons at its disposal and that thanks to it the workers had regained confidence in

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COMMUNIST REVIEW 7

Central Organ of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

MARXISM AND THE AGRARIAN QUESTION



THE COBAS MOVEMENT IN ITALY
AUSTERITY ATTACKS IN AUSTRIA
COMMUNIST TACTICS IN CAPITALISM'S PERIPHERY

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WORKERS VOICE

ULSTER: THE REPRESSIVE OFFENSIVE

Just when we thought we had got used to the appalling spectacle of the self-confident Right in power they seem to have shifted gear once again, and out-done their own vaporous hypocrisy. In the name of freedom and defence of democracy the Thatcher regime has supplemented its previous direct attacks on workers rights and centralisation of authority with a series of initiatives designed to further increase the power of the state.

Images of terrorist outrages like the PAN-AM bombing, continuing strife in Northern Ireland, and even rural punch-ups are milked for their full propaganda value as we are asked to rally behind a strong leader who will protect us from madmen and bloody foreigners.

And if you think this is an exaggeration just consider the arrogance with which the government has brought in repressive legislation over the past six months, especially in Ulster, without even a hint of embarrassment that this might be in conflict with its much vaunted "love of freedom".

GROWING LEGAL ARMOURY

There is a notion that "democratic" regimes are supposed to be sensitive to charges of acting in a repressive manner; Thatchers government on the other hand revels in them. Last year it guaranteed immunity from prosecution for the RUC men implicated by Stalker in the shoot-to-kill cover-up. Later congratulations were in order for the SAS who murdered three un-armed Provos in Gibraltar, and followed up with a similar operation in Ulster in the summer.

Avoiding the temptation to tread carefully at this point, the formal legal offensive was begun. Sinn Fein and the UDA were banned from the mass media, the right to silence - a key concept in bourgeois criminal justice for 300 years - will now be severely limited for trials in Northern Ireland, and an anti-violence oath for politicians is due to be in place before the local council elections in May. This is not a complete list by any means, but even these are only supplements to the state's central document for the suppression of Ulster, the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Described by the British state itself as "draconian"; recommended for limitation many times by both Right and Left; declared a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights; not only does the PTA survive, in March it is to be extended, and will be a permanent part of the statute book rather than emergency legis-

lation. It is under the PTA that several hundred have faced the "internal exile" of exclusion orders, and hundreds of thousands have been stopped, questioned and detained at ports and air ports - nothing less than the "trawling" of entire suspect populations on both sides of the Irish Sea.

We in the CWO have no desire to protect the nationalist gangsters of the IRA or UDA, whose "justice" is no better than that of the state. But those naive enough to think that this is whom the new legislation is solely aimed at need only be pointed to a few examples from



elsewhere to see the offensive in perspective. The right to silence ruling, increased surveillance and phone tapping, and plastic bullets are only a few of the tactical exports from Ulster. And although the British police have not yet resorted to strike-breaking at gunpoint (as the RUC did during the P&O dispute) they showed they were picking up many other tips during the miners strike. In Nottinghamshire alone there were 70 roadblocks during the struggle and 300,000 were stopped. PTA-style exclusion orders and vicious "riot" control techniques all had the enthusiastic backing of the courts.

In Eire too Haughey's hypocrisy seems to have reached new depths. While playing the green card and whimpering to Britain over human rights violations, he remains silent on the implications of Section 31 (of which the British SF/UDA press ban is a pale imitation) and the growing extent to which the Gardai have become trigger and baton-happy, knowing the courts will not touch them.

REFORM OR REVOLUTION

Of course all of the above has not passed off without comment from the liberal and left-wing factions of British capitalism, although their protests have been relatively low-key and disorganised. In the case of the Labour Party this is hardly surprising as they actually introduced the PTA in 1974, and have always been unflinching in their efforts to be more patriotic than the Tories.

In fact the most concerted campaigns against the new legislation have come from beyond the political arena in the form of the middle-class pressure groups Charter 88 and the recently relaunched National Council for Civil Liberties. Dismissed by the Colonel Blimps of the Tory Party as "left-wing trendies" both groups are in reality firmly within the mainstream of capitalist ideology, with Charter 88 in particular making explicit references to the gains of the English bourgeois revolution of 1688, and the role of British imperialism in the defeat of German imperialism in World War Two. They have no quibble with British capitalism and agree that its enemies should be neutralised, seeking only to advise the state on the most effective method of neutralisation. In

Ulster they advise that repressive legislation and actions militate against the chances of wooing the Catholic working class into passivity under the democratic banner. On the mainland they advise that it is dangerous to begin to dismantle the liberal-democratic consensus which has maintained the relative social peace of British capitalism for almost two centuries.

We internationalist communists on the other hand have no advice to offer the state on how it deals with its problems. Rather our job is to denounce the state as the instrument by which the ruling class dominates the rest of society, and which oversees the exploitation of the working class. This means we must also denounce any organisation, whether liberal or supposedly "socialist", which spreads the illusion that the capitalist state can deny its function and abandon repression, or even be used by the working class in their political struggle. Such organisations are capitalist and objectively support the continuation of our exploitation, though at present they are out of touch with the real needs of the bourgeoisie ie: the need to strengthen the repressive apparatus.

Both Charter 88 and the NCCL are falling over themselves to stress the seriousness of the situation at present, but the "danger to civil liberties" is only a symptom of the much greater dangers faced by the working class. It cannot be denied that the political power of the British state is increasing, despite Thatchers claim that she is "rolling back" its influence. Through the state the ruling class is increasing both its physical and ideological attacks.

The speed with which repressive legislation has been passing through Parliament has been matched only by the speed with which laws designed to protect workers, tenant and immigrants have been disappearing. Clause 28, the racist sections of the PTA, the new immigration laws and the curriculum campaigns in the schools and universities are a few examples of the multi-various attempts to create a "public opinion" in line with the ideological priorities of the ruling class. It is clear that the bosses foresee increased confrontation with marginalised sections of the working class as its inability to deal with the economic crisis becomes more evident, and stability is threatened. Nothing else can explain such a concerted effort to tool up with repressive weaponry.

As for our resistance it is clear from the history of the last ten years alone that passively demonstrating and signing petitions to Parliament, no matter how many celebrities sign with you, will simply not do the trick. Whether it be against a single boss or an entire state the defence of the working class lies in its unity of action and in its capacity to paralyse the enemy's increasing power.

Ultimately though, because repression is intrinsic to the state in a capitalist society, the only defence will be to destroy that society and create the freedom which only a world without class divisions can ensure. Such a revolution can only come about if we abandon the partial struggles to reform this or that aspect of capitalist life and concentrate on the only genuinely realistic solution to all the problems we encounter - the building of a socialist alternative. This begins with the work to forge the internationalist party. Join us!

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C.W.O.

I would like to find out more about the CWO ☐

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LONDON
WC1N 3XX

MANCHESTER PUBLIC MEETING

CAPITAL'S REPRESSIVE OFFENSIVE

Time: 8 p.m. Thursday, 23rd February 1989
Place: 'Mother Mac's' [Back Picadilly]