

# workers voice

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# THE BITTER FRUITS OF PERESTROIKA

A large part of the attention of "Workers Voice" in recent issues, has been taken up with events in Eastern Europe, including the U.S.S.R. itself. These we have analysed differently from the bourgeois and leftist pundits, the former seeing them as the failure of communism and triumph of democracy, while many of the latter see them as the renewal of socialism.

To this dialogue of the deaf we have counterposed our own view. It can no longer be maintained that the latest moves in Eastern Europe are a strategic retreat. The ruling circles in the U.S.S.R.-or at least the faction now in power - is surrendering its attempt to maintain the Soviet Union as an independent imperialism; Gerasimov himself has recently said that Russia "should not be regarded as a world power". The U.S.S.R. is attempting - in an as yet unclear fashion - to integrate itself into a new imperialist alignment; possibly as a junior partner in a German dominated "European" imperialism of the future. What Russia does will partly depend on how world imperialism itself reacts to the latest turn of events in the former "evil Empire" which has maintained it in a fragile unity since 1945.

This turn of events is world historic and requires serious theoretical and political analysis by communists. It can clearly be no part of the present article to carry this out. Instead we wish to bring up to date our interpretation of events since the last issue of our paper; events which strikingly confirm the death agony of Russian imperialism and the bitter fruits of perestroika.

## EASTERN EUROPE

Though trying to avoid journalistic snapshots, it is as well to recall what has happened in the last two months in Stalin's former backyard.

THE G.D.R. Krenz's juggling act to maintain the SED monopoly on power, by opening the Wall, failed. Honecker and his allies are to be tried for high treason. A plethora of parties, supported from West Germany, are to contest elections in May (or if Modrow gets his way March), including a re-formed Social Democratic Party (backed by the SDP in the Federal Republic). Huge demonstrations for German Unity have taken place, in contrast to the early days. Yet, paradoxically, the SED heads the opinion polls. But even if it wins this time, an open border with West Germany

will eventually make its position untenable.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA. After a bloodless "revolution" (the dead student who got prime Western TV coverage as a victim of police brutality, turned up alive and well), Havel become head of state, and a predominantly non CP government was installed, calling for the withdrawal of Russian troops, in the country since the 1968 invasion.

BULGARIA. Again the attempt to follow Krenz's path, led to failure, and the CP has abandoned its monopoly of power, and like the GDR and Czechoslovakia, set a date for elections. Because of their superior organisation, the CP's might do better than expected in these elections in Eastern Europe, at least in the first elections; it is doubtful if they would in the long term. Those who greeted the democratic dawn with such enthusiasm, must be becoming a little bewildered, witnessing the democratic upsurge in Bulgaria of anti Turkish sentiment, demanding the expulsion or forcible assimilation of the Turkish minority.

POLAND. The Poles must be feeling neglected. Once the darling of the West, there are now

competitors for the favours of Western imperialism from those who wish to regain their national honour by prostituting themselves to its embrace, east of the Elbe. And, haven't they done well? The new Solidarnosc-dominated government has imposed price rises of 1,000%, something that would have made any previous Stalinist government proud. There is a strike of 30,000 miners in central Poland at the moment. You haven't heard about it? No, but then strikes against "democratic" governments are not exactly prime time news.

ROMANIA. Events there are already history. The sudden and bloody overthrow of Ceausescu's regime was the ideal Christmas present for all democrats. Western governments hailed his fall and denounced his crazy policies, only forgetting that it was Western support and money that enabled Ceausescu to implement them in the days when he was seen to have great democratic credentials himself, because he was anti-Russian (denouncing Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan). The National Salvation Council which overthrew him, with popular backing, is largely composed of Army officers and former

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## EASTERN EUROPE

### CLASS STRUGGLE

In all the turmoil in the USSR and Eastern Europe over the last six months or so the working class has been noticeable by its absence. Apart from Siberian coal miners little has been heard of workers struggling against the new attacks which the changes in Eastern Europe are bringing. Part of this is due to the censorship of the media, both West and East. Workers struggles at any time are bad news, demonstrations for democracy are good news.

However the news of some struggles defies suppression.

In the USSR factory managers complained to the Financial Times (26.1.90) that they were forced to cut wages and hinted that this was leading to strikes. More concretely in Poland the postal workers of Kamienna Gora went on strike and occupied the central post office to demand wage increases of 300%. This sounds a lot until you remember that inflation is over 700% a year and that

the Solidarnosc government has imposed a wage freeze. The outcome of this occupation is not known but the new year has opened with further strikes in five Polish mines involving 30,000 workers.

Bulgaria too is experiencing what the Guardian has called "a spontaneous strike wave" of workers in schools, hospitals, chemical works, mines and printworks. They are demanding job reclassification in order to get higher wages and other social benefits. True to form the leader of the new independent trade union federation has acted like union leaders everywhere.

"We need quick decisions to end these strikes and get Bulgaria out of its critical economic situation." Yet again union leaders are less concerned about the workers and more concerned about saving the national capital. And, surprise, surprise, the media in Bulgaria hasn't reported the strikes. The Bulgarian ruling class are learning democratic ways pretty quickly. Let's hope the Bulgarian working class are learning faster to resist the lies and mystifications of the renewed state apparatus state apparatus ranged against them.



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# PERESTROIKA

officials of the regime, along with some dissidents whom Ceausescu had jailed. Significantly, it doesn't contain any of the Hungarian minority, whose protests started off the uprising. Events in Romania will probably follow the "Polish" pattern of virulent anti-communism and rampant nationalism.

## EASTERN EUROPE'S FUTURE.

Forget all the talk, by those with vested interests as deep as their ignorance of the history of Eastern Europe; this is not the beginnings of a new dawn of prosperity and democracy for central and eastern Europe. Indeed, though the contours might well take some time to form, the whole region faces a new dark age, beside which the Stalinist period may come to be seen as an interregnum of peace.

Eastern Europe has always been "different" from Western Europe, as communists like Gorter and Gramsci realised at the time of the last revolutionary wave (though drawing dissimilar conclusions from this fact). The area has always been economically backward viz a viz western Europe (indeed, it is less so now than it has ever been), with a correspondingly weak working class and middle class, and the weakness of "civil society" against the State. Additionally, the national question has assumed a phenomenal importance in the polyglot region, long since forgotten except in quaint corners of the West (Ulster, Basque country).

Ruled uninterruptedly by the multi-national empires of Russia, Turkey, Prussia (then Germany) and Austria till 1918, the region had a brief "independence" from 1918 till 1939, before falling under Soviet control in the period after 1945. This inter-war period, harked back to with so much nostalgia, was an unmitigated disaster. The weak states of the region fell one by one into fascist or semi-fascist dictatorships of the worst kind. By 1939, with the exception of Czechoslovakia, there was not one functioning bourgeois democracy between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia. Poland, Romania and the others pogromised their Jews, forcibly assimilated their national minorities, and white terror raged against working class movements. Some bourgeois nationalists, in ignorance, wish to go back to a mythical "golden age"; some, more informed, wish to turn the clock back to that barbaric past.

Caught between, first multi-national empires, then Russian and German imperialism, the independence of Eastern Europe could only be a myth. That analysis was not mistaken. Where we went wrong was to assume that Russian control, established in 1945, was final. It now looks as if other imperialisms will step into the vacated breach, in the first instance obviously German imperialism. But Italy has recently refound its Balkan voice; France claims a special relationship with Romania, and even Japan is looking for outlets for its superfluity of capital, in Eastern Europe. The multiplicity of national conflicts within and between these states, not to mention the still unresolved border problems between them (Poland/Germany; Romania/Hungary; Czechoslovakia/Poland; Bulgaria/Turkey; Yugoslavia/Albania, and Yugoslavia/Italy) means that those looking for imperialist spoils will have plenty of levers to pull in their search for influence.

In the absence of a proletarian response - and this at the moment is conspicuous by its absence - the future for the working class in Eastern Europe is bleak. Not only will they face mounting unemployment and price rises as market economies bring their magical gifts to bear, but they will increasingly be dragooned and recruited as cannon fodder by nationalist thugs and gangsters, who have crawled out from under the stones where they lay sleeping.

And Russian control of Eastern Europe will soon be a memory. At the January meeting of C.O.M.E.C.O.N in Sofia many states indicated their determination to make their currencies convertible, thus ending the use of the ruble as the organisation's currency, and also ending Russian control over the economies of the member states. And almost immediately at the Warsaw Pact/NATO meeting in Vienna the

generals of the Pact were falling over themselves to assert that their new "democratic" war plans would be based on their own interests, not Russia's.

## INSIDE THE BEAR

And what of the U.S.S.R. itself? The question now being posed is whether the withdrawal from its "informal" empire in Eastern Europe, will be of necessity followed by a retreat from the formal Empire built up under the Tsars. Russia is a multi national state, with a Slavic core, and non-Slavic fringes. So far the non-Russian Slavs (Ukrainians and White Russians) have been fairly calm, but unrest in the non-Slav fringes of the Empire poses the prospect of a U.S.S.R. reduced to its Slavic heartland in the near future. The main areas where the nationalist bourgeoisie pose threats to Russian control are in the Baltic and in Central Asia/Transcaucasia.

## THE BALTIC STATES

These (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) are akin to the states of central and east Europe. Ruled by foreigners (Swedes, Poles, Germans, Russians) throughout history, and obtaining a brief and inglorious independence courtesy of German Imperialism by the Brest Litovsk Treaty in 1918, before being re-incorporated by Russia after the Hitler Stalin Pact in 1940.

Here Gorbachev has been forced already to cede economic control to the local political bureaucracies, and opposition groups have been legalised in the now familiar East European manner, while in the rest of the U.S.S.R. the Party retains its monopoly of power. These conciliatory measures appear temporarily to have stalled nationalist agitation in Estonia and Latvia, but the alliance of the local Communist Party bureaucracy and independence movement Sajudis in Lithuania has led to a virtual declaration of independence by the bourgeois nationalist forces mobilising the Lithuanian masses, and the split off from the C.P.S.U. of the Lithuanian Communist Party. The only way the momentum in the Baltic can be stopped, is by the massive use of force. It is unlikely that, having rejected this option in Eastern Europe, Gorbachev will resort to it in the Baltic.

## THE BARBARISM IN TRANSCAUCASIA

Of all the bitter fruits of perestroika, the virtual war between Armenia and Azerbaijan must be the most unpalatable. Frozen in the perma frost of Stalinism, thousand year old passions and hatreds awoke in the warm rays of glasnost, manipulated by nationalist proto-ruling classes in alliance with local bureaucrats, threatened by Gorbachev's doomed drive to streamline the Soviet system.

While Azerbaijan, along with Soviet Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan etc) came into Russia as a conquest of Tsarist imperialism in the last century, expanding into the Muslim heartland of the continent, Armenia was different. A medieval Christian state, threatened by Turkey and Iran, it surrendered its independence to Moscow in the eighteenth century, in return for protection against its

Muslim neighbours. Thus Armenian nationalism has historically been pro-Russian. Hence the appeals by the Armenians for "protection" from Moscow, in response to the barbaric pogroms carried out by Azeris on Armenians in Baku in January.

The Kremlin had hoped that the forces of the local Communist parties would be able to win back control of the situation in Transcaucasia; just at the end of 1989 Russian troops were withdrawn from the disputed area of Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian enclave inside Azerbaijan. This pipe dream was exposed by the Azeri pogroms and attacks on Armenian communities, which soon found a ready response in Armenian counter-attacks, leaving hundreds dead. Gorbachev thus had a choice. To do nothing, and watch the secession of Azerbaijan take place to the accompaniment of the mass expulsion and murder of thousands of Armenians; this would probably have provoked an Armenian secession as well. Or to intervene militarily. In doing the latter he has provoked an inevitable corollary; the Azeri attacks on Armenians have turned into a struggle with the Soviet Army, seen as an occupation force which has taken the side of the Armenians.

Some see this as a warning by Gorbachev to all the dissident fringe groups; secession will meet military intervention. We doubt it: it was a case of his hand being forced. And it if was a threat, it will prove to be a counter-productive one. Not only is there opposition to the use of the conscript army for this internal police role but the spread of the conflict in Transcaucasia to Soviet Central Asia is now more, rather than less, likely, given the military intervention in Baku. After Afghanistan the aspirant mujihadeen of Central Asia will not feel that the Russian bear is invincible. Whatever the immediate consequences of events in Baku, and the subsequent twists and turns the conflict takes, the costs of holding on to the Tsarist conquests in Asia appear prohibitive for Russia.

## GORBACHEV'S LEGACY

Gorbachev came to power five brief years ago, promising civil rights, democracy and economic progress. Whilst the bourgeois press were having orgasms about his statemanship in pushing on with disarmament, in pulling out of Afghanistan or in promoting glasnost and perestroika, communists have been pointing out that there is a material reason for all this. Today it is clear to all that the economic crisis in the USSR is terminal. Gorbachev's attempts to raise productivity have led to wage cuts for those who tried to improve production output - and workers resistance, of which the Siberian miners strike was the most public example, is spreading. When he goes he will leave behind him a Russia stripped of its great power status, and in economic and political chaos. That should ensure him a unique place in world history, and canonisation by the high priests of Western capital. But the scramble for his political bequest will itself be the harbinger of new conflicts within imperialism, more difficult to solve.

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## LETTER FROM NORWAY

Organisationally the ICC's gung-ho attitude had yielded some success since revolutionaries in Mexico and India have adhered to the ICC specifically because they accepted their messianic view of the present advancing class struggle. We find this rather sad since it implies that these elements are in for a rude awakening at some time or another. We hope your contribution will act as a warning to others to be critical about the ICC's perspectives.

However there have been some faint signs of hope in recent ICC pronouncements. The break-up of the Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe has at last brought reality home to them in some form. After castigating the CWO as "pacifist" for suggesting that this might happen a couple of years ago, they are now telling us that "the perspective of world war has receded further into the distance" (WR130). Unfortunately that is as far as it goes. We are still to believe that the Soviet Empire has collapsed because the Soviet ruling class did not dare go to war for fear of the response of the Russian

working class, we are still told that there was massive class struggle in the 1980s and we are not told why the 1980s did not turn out to be the "years of truth" for the working class as the ICC so tantalisingly promised. The ICC has not been good at admitting it was wrong but such a word was heard at one of their public meetings recently. A bit more glasnost like this and dialogue between revolutionaries might be come more meaningful. But to be absolutely certain of this we cannot shirk from confronting present reality, however unpalatable the consequences. And neither can we avoid reflecting theoretically on that reality or we will leave the working class defenceless to face the further onslaughts that capitalism is already preparing for us. This is a process which demands the active participation of all of in the proletarian camp.

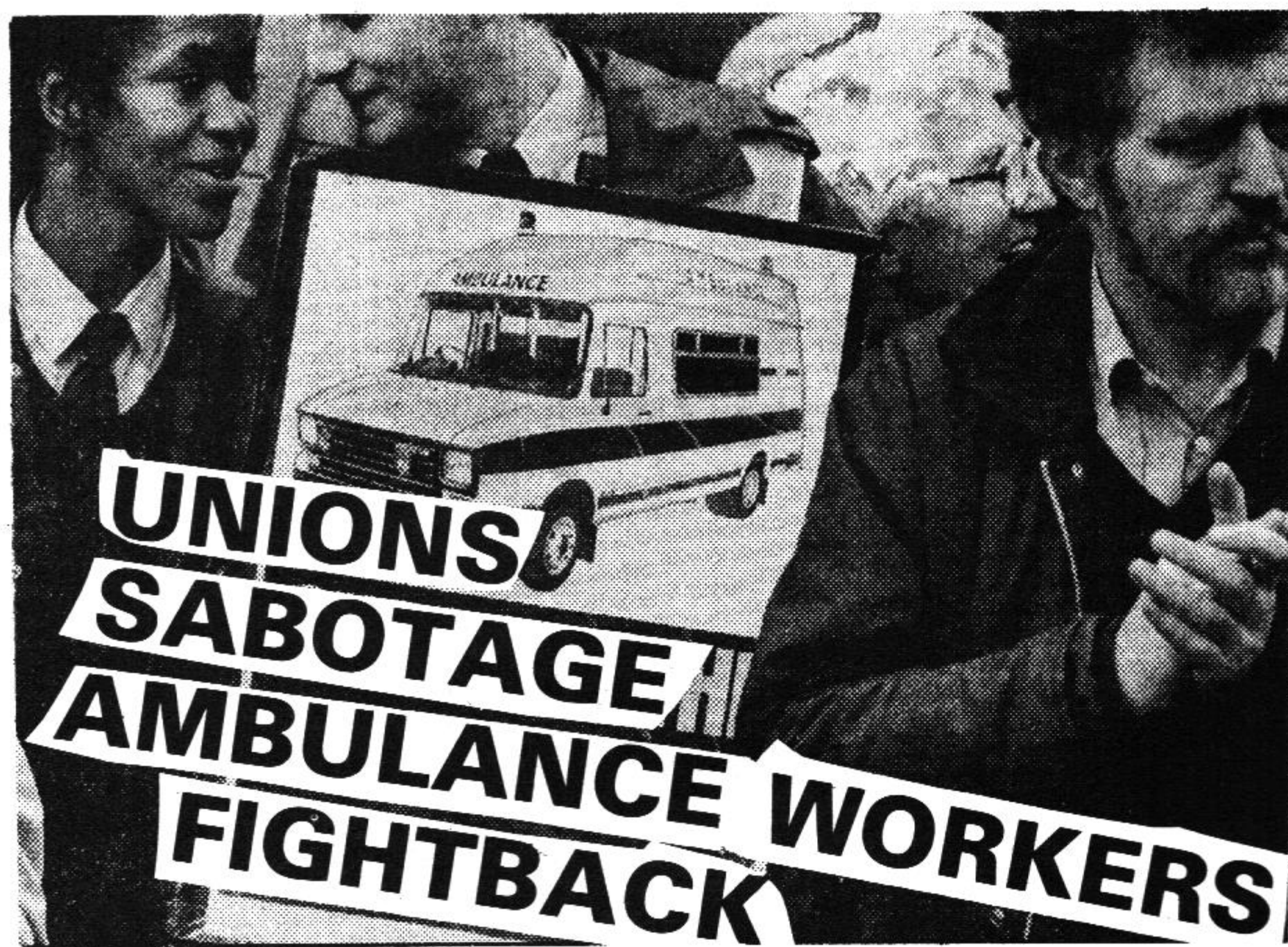
CWO

31.1.90

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After five months of the ambulance workers' dispute, the unions' tactic of winning public support has led nowhere. The 15 minute farce organized by the T.U.C. on 30 January was deliberately designed to have as little impact as possible. It was held at lunchtime to minimize disruption and was organized to keep sections of workers separate from each other. For the unions, this show of "people power" was the highpoint of the dispute so far. But as we said in our leaflet, given out to ambulance workers at the London rally in January, public sympathy will never be enough, and has so far achieved absolutely nothing. By sticking to public sympathy alone, the unions are blocking any effective fightback against the bosses' attacks. The leaders of all five ambulance unions have rejected calls for all-out action and have refused to call for a national strike ballot. They have clearly stated they will not support any local strikes and are telling striking ambulance crews to go back to work and provide an emergency service. In fact, they are bending over backwards to reach a settlement with the bosses. When Kenneth Clarke, the Health Secretary, demanded local pay and productivity

deals, Roger Poole, the unions' chief negotiator, quickly suggested there could be regional salary variations.

But it isn't just the union leaders who are selling ambulance workers out, the grassroots of the unions, the shop stewards, also decided not to fight for a national strike ballot or even hold a vote on a stoppage in London. It's the unions themselves not the people in them that prevent any fight back and they will never support striking workers if it will put their organisations at risk. Even the most militant trade-unionist will end up protecting the unions instead of fighting for its members, and the

ambulance dispute has shown this

clearly. The shop-stewards want to regain control of the unofficial strikes and are happy to use the tactic of public support to break these strikes. As the chairman of the London shop-stewards, John Boast, put it, "I'm sure our members will not turn their backs on the public."

Ambulance workers cannot afford to follow the unions who are only too happy to play the bosses' legal games. The unions will never put their wealth at risk by striking or organizing secondary action. They would rather standby while the bosses spend more money trying to defeat ambulance workers than pay them a living wage. The bosses have already spent more than 10 million pounds on using the police and the army to break the ambulance workers' struggle -- a figure which

is more than the cost of meeting the original pay claim. The unions and the bosses both hope that the ambulance workers will not fight back through strikes because it might put people's lives at risk. But if the bosses really cared about people's lives, they wouldn't have stopped them using the ambulances and equipment to answer 999 calls and they wouldn't have offered them a paycut in the first place. The bosses are only concerned about profits and that's why all health - workers are badly paid under capitalism. The bosses hope they won't fight back because of their social conscience and the unions try to stop them fighting back by keeping them isolated, and insisting that they are a "special case". The latter is best illustrated by the ambulance unions' request that the march to the rally at Trafalgar Square on 13 January be restricted to ambulance, fire staff and their families!!

But despite all the unions' attempts to keep ambulance crews at work, the most militant areas have come out on unofficial strike and are fighting outside of and against the unions. Crews, for example, in Manchester, London, Edinburgh, Leeds and Crawley (Sussex) have all seen through the tactics of the unions and have taken unofficial action.

#### THE WAY FORWARD

As we said in our leaflet, the only way to win is to take the struggle out of the unions' control and elect strike committees to organize an united national strike around clear demands. Pickets should be sent to bring out other workers in solidarity action. Worker solidarity not people power can still win this dispute.

## PANAMA: JUST CAUSE FOR A MASSACRE?

Good old Uncle Sam has brought "freedom and democracy" to Panama. Western civilisation can breath a sigh of relief now that wicked General Noriega is banged up in a Florida prison cell. Never mind the the 1000 or more mainly working class civilians killed in the wake of "Operation Just Cause", or the 25,000 made homeless in US imperialism's latest Central American adventure. Noriega himself would have been hard pressed to perpetrate such a massacre, even in his wildest dreams.

There is no reason to doubt US claims that Noriega was a corrupt and murderous tyrant. There is also no reason to doubt that Noriega was brought to power with the assistance of a certain Mr George Bush, erstwhile director of the CIA. That's why on December 20th 1989 Bush set out not merely to depose but to kill this enfant terrible of US imperialism so that Noriega would not get the chance to spill the beans on his old buddy. The last thing Bush wanted was the re-opening of old wounds such as gun-running to the Contras in Nicaragua, or Washington's involvement in the lucrative cocaine trade. However, despite the deployment of 12,000 crack para-troopers and the latest F-117 bombers which are supposed to slip through radar, the Americans managed to miss Noriega's headquarters allowing him to escape.

Sooner or later most sinners show up in church and Noriega being a man who loves the bible is no exception. The Papal Nuncio in Panama City soon found that he was playing host to a rather unwelcome guest. After several days of jiggery-popery between the US the Vatican and Noriega, spurred on by the Nuncio's fear that his embassy may be bombard-ed with more than rock'n' roll, Noriega was persuaded to surrender to US custody. It was agreed that Noriega would not face the death penalty, and that he would be able to wear his smart uniform. The other deals that were made may or may not ever come to light.

The invasion of Panama has been a real boon for Bush's domestic image, allowing the US to pose as a saviour of democracy and the scourge of the drug cartels. In reality although the US prefers to have "democratic" vassal states to do its bidding, the US has supported countless dictatorships throughout the world. In Panama, by appearing to support "democracy", the US has not only claimed the moral high-ground but has also won a Hollywood Oscar for hypocrisy. Similarly the US has tolerated the cocaine trade for years to the enrichment of various persons seen not infrequently on Capitol Hill. As up until recently cocaine abuse has largely been confined to the impoverished black ghettos of the large cities, the government has been reluctant to intervene. For the ruling class crack wars are far preferable to class wars. Now the white middle class sons and daughters of Republican voters have been taking to cocaine-leaf based recreational activities to the extent that drugs are popularly perceived to be America's number one social problem. Bush has to be seen doing something about it, and Noriega with his deep involvement in the Medellin drug cartel was a deliciously expedient target..

Undoubtedly Bush has benefitted enormously from the "Falklands factor" aspect of the Panama adventure. Whilst the the rednecks have been a whoopin' an' a hollerin' with jingoistic frenzy as might be expected, the liberal wing of the ruling class have merely bleated about the incompetence and excess of the exercise. Just like the British Labour Party during the Falklands war you can bet your bottom dollar that the left factions of the ruling class will always rally to the defence of the national capital in a crisis.

Behind all the hypocrisy and the rhetoric the invasion of Panama has serious long-term implications for the role of US imperialism in Central and South America. For marxists the question of the "legality" of the invasion is completely irrelevant. The concept of "Inter-

national Law" (by which the US has tried to justify it's actions, and it's bourgeois critics have condemned it) is nothing but a massive bourgeois humbug that disguises the real nature of relations between states which at the bottom line are determined by economic and military power. Panama, following on from the US backed war against the Sandinistas and the invasion of Grenada to install a pro US faction, and intervention in El Salvador shows that Uncle Sam don't take no mess in his back yard. Noriega had done the dirty on his old patrons and had been trying to pose as a figure of national liberation against the US. Throughout Latin America US multi-national corporations dominate benefitting from paying starvation wages and the lack of pollution controls. Any potential threat to these interests are not taken lightly by the US bourgeoisie. Panama has additional significance because of the canal which is controlled by the US and gives it a "Legitimate" reason to maintain a large military presence in Panama. The US feared that Noriega may try to nationalise the canal when the treaty comes up for renewal in 1999. By installing the puppet Endara government the US hopes to guarantee its long term control of the canal.

The US invasion also serves as a warning to other countries in the region, especially to America's old enemy, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. If the Sandinistas don't let a pro US faction win the forthcoming elections they may also receive an unsolicited visit from their northern neighbours. The US will also be able to tighten the economic screws against the Sandinistas as under Noriega Panama was a prime conduit for evading US trade sanctions against Nicaragua.

The Panama incident is just one example of the capitalist barbarism existing in the world today. Whether the protagonists are Bush and Noriega or Gorbachev and the Azerbaijan National Liberation Front, socialists denounce all national banners and national struggles. Only when workers realise the need to unite across national boundaries in support of their own class interests will the current imperialist order begin to crumble.



# INTERNATIONAL BUREAU FOR THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

# ADDRESS TO THE WORKERS

Comrades, Workers

The collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe has opened up a period of both hope and of danger. But whilst the period of hope lies sometime in the future, the period of danger is today. No-one can regret the passing of the Stalinist old guard (especially in its most monstrous form like Ceaucescu in Romania), but we must also ask who will benefit the most from the new state of affairs in Eastern Europe.

It will not be the working class. It will, first of all, be the Western firms and multinationals who dominate the markets of the so-called "free world". They see Eastern Europe as both a market for their generally useless (but frequently "desirable", thanks to their marketing techniques) consumer goods and as a new source of exploitable cheap labour. They are rubbing their hands at the chance to exploit "some of the best educated workers in the world" at "Third World wage levels".

Next to benefit will be those who made up the majority of the demonstrators in Leipzig, in Prague, in Bucharest etc that is the well-dressed sons and daughters of the professional classes. It was those who were not short of a few korunas or marks but who wanted access to the better quality consumer goods from the West. This is why they were in the forefront of the demand for "freedom" - Western bourgeois freedom where those with the most cash will not only be able to get better consumer goods but will also hold the most influence.

This is why they were portrayed as the heroes by the western media every night on the television. "Peoples power topples tyrants" ran every night for weeks. But the reality, as we all know, was very different. The reality was that Gorbachev had abandoned the Stalinist regimes to shift for themselves so that (for example) the 380,000 Soviet troops in the GDR were confined to their barracks. Once it had dawned on the petty bourgeois middle class elements that there was no real danger of a military response the demonstrations suddenly became politically unstoppable.

The real cause of the Stalinist collapse in Eastern Europe is not therefore "people's power" but the economic crisis in the USSR. This crisis is no different from the crisis which the US-dominated sectors of the planet have been facing for almost two decades. It is also a crisis brought about by the slow-down of the accumulation of capital. This was hidden for years in the centrally planned economy of the USSR but was obvious by 1979 when productivity was seen to be falling in nearly half of all industrial enterprises. By 1982 Andropov was trying to do something about it. Gorbachev and perestroika didn't come from nowhere. They are the system's own response to the depths of an economic crisis which has not only failed to respond to his cure but is in danger of dying from it. This is because this "restructuring" (which is what perestroika means) will have to go much further if it is to enjoy any kind of success. And however limited this success is, it can only be bought on the backs of the workers.

In the USSR inflation is at least 19% but workers wages are going down as perestroika aims to increase productivity directly by simply cutting wage bills in each factory. It is the kind of restructuring which has been experienced by workers in the West over the last ten years. It means unemployment for millions and harder work for those still with a job. A few may get wage increases if they have skills in shortage areas but the lowest paid will suffer an absolute decline in living standards. This has already begun to happen in some East European countries.

Worst off of all are the Polish workers. No sector of the Eastern European working class resisted austerity measures more successfully

than the Polish workers. Three times between 1970 and 1980 they literally fought off the price rises which the Gomulka and Gierke governments were trying to impose. And then came "Solidarnosc". Solidarnosc arose out of the strike committees, genuine expressions of the Polish working class, which led the struggle against austerity. But what happened then? The political character of Solidarnosc became clear. It was not a workers' movement, though workers continued to support it. It was a Polish nationalist movement. Once the Stalinists who ran the PUWP realised this they saw it as less of a threat. Eventually when more austerity was required they invited Solidarnosc in to the government because it was clear that it existed not to defend the workers but to defend Polish capitalism. And what a fine job it has done! Now it is the government it has imposed 1000% price increases (regularly topped up by inflation of 60% a year) and a wage freeze to go with it. There have been some strikes but these rises are far worse than those proposed in the past. But the workers believe the Solidarnosc message that their sacrifice is "for Poland" and that things will get better in the future. These calls for austerity and belt tightening "in the national interest" (which is always the bosses interest) have been heard too often in the West but the workers in the East will soon become sick of the same hypocritical calls.

## PRESENT DANGERS - FUTURE SOLUTIONS

The political flux in Eastern Europe and the USSR continues but the one voice which has yet to be heard is that of the working class. Political parties are springing up everywhere (36 in Czechoslovakia alone) but not one of these has a working class programme. Aided by financial and other forms of aid from right wing and social-democratic organisations in the West the petty bourgeoisie are re-organising (whilst the bourgeoisie is re-organising). Peasant parties, social-democratic parties, liberal parties and nationalist parties are springing up everywhere. In such a situation there are several political dangers facing the working class but two in particular which they have to resist.

The first of these is the idea that "democracy" will provide a solution to their problems. Democracy is the greatest illusion that has ever been created to hide the dictatorship of a single class. In theory everyone is free to choose but how is that choice arrived at? Workers must generally choose between parties which have the financial means to organise and which receive

the support of the press which is owned by the rich few. "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas" as Marx put it, 150 years ago. "Public opinion" is thus dictated by the ruling class, the political agenda is drawn up by them. Only the rich are free under democracy and we can see now that the more dominant the bourgeoisie are the more stable will be the democracy of a society. Democracy is the political form through which the bourgeoisie exercise a dictatorship over the rest of society. And it is all the stronger because it is more disguised than the Stalinist variety.

Of course there is no crude police state in a democracy! Phones are tapped "legally", the police only beat up workers in cells, and judges dish out class justice - workers get jailed whilst bourgeois crooks are fined or let off. The beauty of democracy is that they keep on telling you that you are free and in five years time you have the right to vote against the government. The essence of democracy is that it reduces the vast majority of citizens to passivity whilst leaving political activity to a class of hucksters known as politicians who bid for the patronage of this or that vested interest and are only interested in the citizens at election-time. Getting workers to wait five years for elections has been a manoeuvre successfully used time and time again to postpone any real social change.

But to move on to the second danger. The old Stalinist order has not collapsed completely everywhere and much of the bureaucracy, police etc remains dominated by these elements. It would not be surprising if these monsters managed to reconstitute themselves (under whatever label, social-democratic, or nationalist) with some programme which recruited workers on the basis of defending the old system of state social security. To some extent this is already happening in Romania where the National Salvation Front's ex-Communist Party ministers have gone round factories and drummed up the workers as demonstrators against the students and middle class groupings who want western-style democracy. More odiously, it is also happening in Bulgaria where hardline Stalinists have taken up Bulgarian nationalism. They have organised demonstrations against those of Turkish descent (who recently had penal laws imposed by the dictator Zhivkov lifted). Similar racist movements are also being organised by the Communist Party hardliners in the Russian part of the USSR.





# WORKERS OF EASTERN EUROPE

Neither democracy nor Stalinism (however reconstituted) have anything to offer the working class except more exploitation and more poverty. Workers in Eastern Europe have to begin their own organisations, putting forward their own demands and their own programme. This will not be easy. Whilst the new leaders of the governments will get plenty of outside help from Western agencies (including the CIA etc) the workers in these countries will have few resources and little experience of political struggle. However they have their collective strength and they must use it. Even as this article is being typed workers in Poland have begun a series of determined strikes against the austerity policies of the Solidarnosc government. This is the beginning of the struggle for workers own demands.

Workers, however, need more than mere demands. They also need a programme around which to organise themselves as a class. Such a programme cannot come from thin air but has to be the result of the workers own struggles. However what better starting point than to take the lessons of the struggles undertaken by workers throughout Europe, but particularly in Eastern Europe during the last hundred years.

First amongst these was the Russian Revolution of 1917. In that revolution millions of workers joined together in councils (soviets) to sweep away parliaments and other organs of bourgeois rule.

The infection spread and council republics were set up in Munich and in Hungary and almost every country in Europe had one example or another of workers trying to set up councils. Between 1919 and 1921 "the spectre of communism" really did haunt the ruling classes of Europe. But they held on. This was in no small measure thanks to the Social Democrats (the same ones who are today re-appearing in Central Europe) in Germany. Germany was the key to the spread of the workers revolution but the Social Democrats, whilst still posing as a workers party entered into an agreement with the Army High Command which unleashed the fascist Freikorps on the revolutionary workers. Thousands of them were shot, many in cold blood, all in the name of saving German (and European) democracy.

With the defeat of the revolution in Germany and Central Europe the workers in Russia were isolated. They also had their own troubles. Millions of them died as a result of the war launched on them by the armies of imperialism (including the USA, Britain, France and Japan). But the biggest casualty of all was the Soviet Republic. The war led to the decline of the soviets power and decisions were increasingly taken by officials. Party rule replaced working class rule and the New Economic Policy was the first step on the road to the restoration of capitalism. When Stalin announced "socialism in one country" the counter-revolution had already taken place. Stalin was the consequence not the cause of that counter-revolution. How far it was from the communist dreams of the Bolsheviks can be underlined when we recognise that they were the first victims of the terror apparatus he set up. Millions of communist workers followed them to the firing squad and the gulags.

Stalinism thus represented the defeat of communism and not its victory. Now that the workers of Eastern Europe are beginning to shake off that incubus they can begin to re-discover their own revolutionary past and to reconstitute a revolutionary programme. This will not be an easy task but it is essential that it is carried out to give a guide and reference point to all those workers trying to find a proletarian solution to the problems of today.

Drawing on the lessons of the last seventy or so years the main tenets of this programme should be;

1. The emancipation of the working class is the task of the workers themselves. Socialism cannot be imposed by decree nor is it the work of a specialised class of politicians. On the contrary it is about the breakdown of the artificial barriers imposed by capitalist society. Socialism can only be constructed through the efforts of millions of human beings. Otherwise it would be simply another form of rule where the governed left running the system to a specialist class of governors. The historically discovered form of a workers' government is the soviet or council in which delegates are subject to election and to instant recall by the workers that elected them.

2. State ownership of the means of production and state planning do not equal socialism. Nor are they steps on the way to socialism. The essential conditions for socialism are that it a) should abolish the exploitation of wage labour as the basis of the economic organisation of society and b) that money as a form of exchange should be abolished. Under socialism there would be no private property, including state property which is a form of theft from the rest of society.

3. Socialism cannot be established in single country, state or nation. Commodity production must be wiped out everywhere as part of an unfolding process towards a world-wide community of freely-associated producers. In this process all national frontiers will be abolished. The revolution for socialism has, by its very nature, to be an international or global phenomenon.

4. In order to defeat its class enemy the working class has to form itself politically and this means the creation of a political party. This party will not be a proto-state but will provide theoretical and practical leadership for the working class in its struggle to overthrow capitalist exploitation. This party must also be international to unite the most advanced workers everywhere. This party cannot come into being overnight but the political clarification and discussions to establish such a party begin today. This party will not be a new ruling class - a task which belongs to the working class itself.

5. Capitalism is in permanent crisis and the present period is no exception. This crisis has palliatives but it has no cure. As it decays it will try to divide workers, to draw them into support for different bourgeois campaigns such as rival nationalisms, racism or social democracy. As it has no ultimate solution to its economic crisis capitalism will sooner or later be driven, as it has in the past, to new wars. The working class must resist this internationally by sabotaging and striking against their local bourgeois leadership. To the bourgeois plans for war we must counterpose the proletarian programme of international revolution.

Such a programme will have to be fought for. Workers will need convincing that it is Stalinism and state capitalism and not communism which has failed. The marxist vision of communism remains untouched because it has never been tried.

But if getting across a marxist programme is difficult in the short term it does not remove the need for workers to defend themselves in the daily struggle with capital - whatever form it might take. The most important things for workers to do are

- organise. In any struggle all strike or other organisations (committees/assemblies) should be kept as open as possible with recallable delegates where appropriate. This will keep more workers actively involved in the struggle and prevents any attempted tactics of divide and rule. Circulate the responsibilities on the strike committees so that it is harder for the bosses to work on one or other strike leader.

- solidarise. Always try to involve other workers in strikes. This is the best way to build up elementary solidarity. Without it, as many recent examples in Western Europe show even the most militant and conscious workers can be isolated and beaten. In this

## COMMUNIST REVIEW 8

Central Organ of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party



The End of the Berlin Wall...  
The Fall of Ceausescu...  
The Nationalities Crisis in the USSR...  
The World Debt Crisis...  
Permanent Unemployment in the West...  
Starvation in the Capitalist Periphery...

### IS THERE A CRISIS OF COMMUNISM OR A CRISIS OF CAPITALISM?

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of the Chinese People's Republic

Bourgeois Barbarity in China: Another Face of  
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context it is a good idea to strike in defence of ethnic minorities in the working class. This sends out the message that the bosses cannot divide you.

- inform. Always try to get the maximum of publicity including international publicity. The bourgeoisie of every country has a clear interest (and intent) in suppressing news of strikes etc. It is an elementary step against isolation.

Workers in Eastern Europe will already be beginning to learn these lessons. Already workers at the central Post Office in Kamienna Gora have occupied their workplace against the Solidarnosc government's austerity measures. They have so far remained isolated although elsewhere in Poland 30,000 miners in 5 mines are also on strike for wage increases. In Bulgaria, despite nationalist attempts to divert them printers, miners, teachers, chemical workers and doctors are all on strike to have their jobs regraded so that they can claim higher wages and social benefits. To these and other workers we offer our solidarity in the struggle against the wages system of capitalist exploitation.

## READERS MEETING

EASTERN EUROPE AND

THE CLASS STRUGGLE

Place: Mt. Pleasant Community Centre  
Sharrow Lane, SHEFFIELD.

Time: 7.30 p.m.

Date: Thursday, 8th March

ALL WELCOME!



## LETTER FROM NORWAY

# THE ICC, THE CLASS STRUGGLE AND REVOLUTIONARY THEORY

In Workers Voice 46 we printed extracts from the first newsletter from Motiva Forlag, a small proletarian group in Norway. Just before the end of last year a second letter arrived. We are again printing extracts from it because it makes a political point which we have been trying to underline for some time about the methodology of the International Communist Current

Dear Comrades

The main topic of this letter is a critique of parts of what the "International communist Current" has written about Norway...

We have read the press of the ICC for many years, but we are not "impressed" by it...

If we are to believe "World Revolution, monthly paper in Britain of the ICC", Norway was in turmoil in 1986. The working class was attacked so hard that it rose up as one man to fight back this attack on their wages. "The Norwegian class responded to this with the most serious wave of struggles since 1931 ... Lock-outs ... meant 120,000 or 10% of Norway's employed population were involved in the dispute." (WR No.94)

For those unfamiliar with the real situation this might look impressive. Unfortunately the reality behind this "most serious wave of struggles" was somewhat different. The main event was a lock-out by the employers federation (NAF) during the negotiation of national agreements. In the process of these negotiations, the workers were almost totally excluded. When the lock-out was effected the workers were passively called out like pawns in a game of chess. The whole process of negotiating national agreements is a game between the employers, the unions and the state with the workers as passive spectators. The lock-out backfired for the employers' federation and revealed important differences of interest among the employers. LO - the main national union federation - emerged strengthened, and most likely with a stronger credibility among the workers. In the middle of this muddle the government was changed from a centre/right to a social-democratic one. The whole left came out of this process strengthened. "World Revolution" sees the result of this through the spectacles of the "Financial Times": "...but the deal 'turned out costlier than expected' (FT 17.4.86) Only struggle pays! (WR No. 94)

The comrades of WR use phrases like "the most serious wave of struggles", "massive class struggles" and "struggles of the working class" completely uncritically. What do these phrases mean? Comparing the real movements with the descriptions of WR, I can only come to the conclusion that by using such phrases which do not correspond to reality, "World Revolution" spreads lies. Lies in the sense that their descriptions and use of phrases do not correspond to reality, and thus giving their readers a completely false impression of what is going on. There should be no secret that the class struggle in Norway is at a low level. Hence any sign of a change is welcome, but events so far must be seen only as steps towards such a change. A true interpretation of the lock-out and strikes in recent years is that they could signal such a change...

I would think that the comrades of the Swedish section (of the ICC) would have written to "World Revolution" and "International Review" to correct the false reports and interpretations of the events of 1986... But no, "World Revolution" No. 95 and 96 and "International Review" 47 still spreads the fantasies about the "massive strikes" of April 86:

"...Finland and Norway have been hit simultaneously by massive outbreaks of struggle" (WR No. 95)

"In Norway the massive strikes in April were

followed..." (WR No. 96)

"These struggles, which followed widespread movements in Scandinavia and particularly Norway..." (International Review No. 47)

## INTERNATIONALISME AND THE STRIKE OF 1988

...the comrades of the section of the ICC in Belgium (Internationalisme - CWO) felt they knew enough about the conditions and details of the class struggle in Norway to write an article...

Let us look at what comrade "Anjou" has to say about strikes in Norway. The article contains news about one strike and one demonstration on March 11th 1988. The article is not very precise about events, but the figure of participants is fairly correct (I don't know the exact number myself - the newspapers here wrote that more than 300,000 participated). The article does not mention that the strike was of a very limited duration - between 2 hours and half a working day - on March 11th. The way "Anjou" writes you might get the impression that the strike lasted much longer. The article is absolutely wrong in asserting that the strike was "against the advice of the unions". The fact is that the strike was called and organised by several white collar national union federations and some local union bodies, but the biggest union federation, LO, did not participate and called the strike "illegal". There are several reasons for this. The negotiations between LO, NAF and the government settled for a small fixed pay rise (1 krone) and a law was passed banning all further rises. LO thus had its aims fulfilled: lowering real wages by giving almost no pay rise. The union federations outside LO protested against being excluded from real influence in the negotiations, as the result was binding for them also as a result of the law being passed. These union federations did not oppose the result in general but wanted to distribute the wage rise in a different way. The strike was mainly in the public sector where competition between LO and the other unions is fiercest. In the private sector, among workers and lower level employees, LO is stronger; often without competition. LO is a social-democratic union, and thus it supports the social-democratic government.

Some local union bodies of LO took part in the strike and demonstration, and this was against the wishes and advice of LO. But this was clearly a demonstration of the lower levels of the union bureaucracy which was protesting against the ban on the local negotiation of wages. These local negotiations have been a very important field of work for the unions at the base i.e. in the factories. Many workers supported this protest of the local unions and took part or were sympathetic to the protest.

The whole "lesson" which "Anjou" draws out of this strike is absolutely wrong. There is no reason to say that the strike showed a "mounting distrust of the unions", the majority of participants didn't go on strike "against the advice of the unions" - in fact none of the participants went on strike without being called by their union, either national or local, there were no attempts by workers to "take matters into their own hands". Further there were parts of the private sector taking part in the strike and the demonstrations so the point of "they didn't see the vital importance of spreading the fight to the private sector workers" is not in accordance with what actually happened.

But perhaps even more important that all this is that in the words of "Anjou" it is presented as a workers' strike, whereas in reality it was a union strike, and that is a hell of a difference.

## CONCLUSION

The positions taken by revolutionaries are more and more determined by the actual class struggle. Arguments about theory and history are, of course, still very important, but more and more debates and positions will be based on workers struggles, actions by the bourgeoisie i.e. based on the present class struggle and a correct interpretation and analysis of these events.

What the ICC has written about Norway in recent years has neither been good reporting of the actual class struggle nor useful interpretation or analysis. Regarding Norway the views of the ICC and their presentations to their readers are wrong.

If what we have seen in the example of Norway is also typical for the general presentation of actual events in other countries, the press of the ICC is of limited use for revolutionaries.

NK

## CWO REPLY

Dear Comrades

Thank you for providing such well-documented evidence on a specific case. The editor of WORKERS VOICE wishes there were more newsletters from different areas like yours to keep us better informed about struggles around the world. As your letter shows, information is suppressed by the bourgeois press and can be distorted by revolutionaries who wish to support their own particular theories.

However we have to say right away that we disagree with your conclusion that "the actual class struggle" will determine the positions of revolutionaries. As your newsletter makes clear there is little class struggle going on at present to affect revolutionary positions. On the contrary in this rapidly shifting world what the working class needs is a clear programme based on its own historic gains of the past. Only with this as a starting point will the working class be able to break with bourgeois ideology - something it has not so far succeeded in doing except to the smallest degree.

The problem with the ICC's "lies" is not that they spring from a political perspective based on theoretical understanding. The problem is that they are based on a need to find evidence to support THE ICC's PERSPECTIVES that the working class are moving towards a final confrontation with capitalism. Throughout the 1980s the chief difference between the International Bureau and the ICC has been their insistence that that class is advancing in a series of waves of class struggle (initiated in May 1968) towards the socialist revolution. We, on the other hand, have been constantly pointing to the fact that the class has been fighting a rearguard action as it defends itself from the worst attacks of the crisis (an estimation which appears to be shared by you) Their incapacity to face up to present-day reality has made it all but impossible for any meaningful dialogue to take place between us.

Thus the answer is to reject the ICC's distortion of reality into the prism of their own theory and not to reject theory altogether. Whilst the latter represents the abandonment of a basic task of communists and ends up (ultimately) in economism, the former is simply anti-marxist. Perhaps we should remember the passage from the Communist Manifesto

"The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer.

They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes."

We think the ICC are a long way from the "existing class struggle" precisely because they are trying to impose a prescription on the existing situation.



# REVIEW

## MOVING THE MOUNTAIN

"Moving the Mountain: Inside the Perestroika Revolution" Abel Aganbegyan, Bantam Press, £14.95

If any more proof were needed that perestroika is about restructuring an ailing CAPITALIST economy (not reintroducing capitalism by a supposed revolution 'from above') then here it is. Despite the cover which portrays the author as "economic advisor to President Gorbachev" this book hardly reveals startling inside information. In point of fact Aganbegyan no longer has the ear of Gorbachev and the rather sparse 'hard information' the book contains could be gathered from any careful reading of press reports by the professional Sovietologists. However, what this garbled and hastily written (one suspects, hastily dictated) account does confirm (apart from the author's cashing-in on Western fascination with perestroika) is: a) how few real changes have been made to economic life inside Russia and b) the increasingly audacious strategy of perestroika as the economic crisis impels the Russian ruling class to up the stakes in a gamble which, if it fails, could result in the economic and political ruin of the USSR.

A gamble though it may be, perestroika, as Aganbegyan points out, "didn't appear out of nowhere" but developed in response to what are euphemistically termed the "years of stagnation" of the Brezhnev period. In fact by the end of the Seventies stagnation was turning into actual decline and Aganbegyan claims that Kosygin approached him for advice in 1979 when 40% of factory production was declining and following a recession in agricultural output the previous year. During the 10th Five Year Plan (1976-80) we read that the growth in labour productivity was halved while production costs of industry increased and goods produced lost their competitiveness on the world market. These are familiar problems to Western ears. They are the problems associated with the crisis of capital accumulation. And Russian capital no less than its Western counterpart is obliged to seek a solution primarily by increasing the rate of exploitation of the working class. Not surprisingly, therefore, a recurring theme in the first two-thirds of the book is how to get workers to work harder and in a context of no quality control, how to get them interested enough in what they're doing to care about the quality of the finished goods. Thus there is a whole section devoted to "How Can We Make People Care About Their Work?" and repeated references to the need to make the worker feel part of the workplace.

When state capitalism is as cumbersome, centralised and corrupt as it has been in Russia there are few carrots to hold out to the working class. Time and again the futility of offering higher wages when "there's no connection between earnings and buying power" is pointed out. While workers in the West have fallen easy prey to consumerism and are up to their eyes in debt the working class in Russia,

"Unable to spend the money it earns, ... has acquired enormous, absolutely unheard-of savings. In the previous five year plan the average annual amount paid into the savings bank went up by less than 13bn roubles. In 1986 the increase was 22bn roubles, in 1988 13bn roubles. There has been a considerable increase in the amount of money kept at home. This too has lost the state an important source of finance. Unsatisfied demand has become a real problem." (pp. 240-241)

When the basic necessities of life - a roof over your head and staple foods - come cheap as a result of state subsidies (low quality though they are); when the black market cannot provide life's 'little extras' and when only those who are in the right party cliques have access to the spoils of corruption (unmentioned by Aganbegyan), it's not surprising that the Russian ruling class has been unable to link productivity increases to wages as is done so often in the West. What the architects of perestroika have realised is that Russian capital needs more subtle ways to extract surplus value from its alienated workers. Apparently Kosygin rejected the idea of abandoning state price fixing. Today 'price reform' is a central

aim of perestroika, alongside handing 'economic independence' to factories (i.e. allowing them to operate on a direct profit and loss basis, preferably with workers self-management so that they will have an interest in their own exploitation), regional autonomy, 'bank reform' (where banks can borrow and lend at their own discretion rather than being allocated funds to provide for enterprises targeted by the state) and a progressive income tax.

In this cynical account the author reveals perestroika, not as an attempt to dismantle socialism, much less state capitalism, but to win over the working class to the reorganisation of production on a profitable basis. The perestroika faction of the Russian ruling class have had to persuade their 'comrades' of the value of the state appearing to withdraw from economic life. There is more than one way to skin a cat and,

"There are many ways for the state to regulate the economy one of the prime ones being taxation, which, in some capitalist countries, generates a considerable part of the national budget. Others are state purchase orders, the regulating function of the central bank, and state regulation of the market in stocks and shares and currency exchange. In a number of cases state regulation in these areas has been very successful, particularly when a country needed to be extricated from a difficult economic situation." (p.63)

Later on Aganbegyan points out that when domestic prices are determined by the market than the currency itself can be the lever of control.

So entranced with the supposed success of the West is Aganbegyan that names like Erhardt, Samuelson, Galbraith, Friedman, Thatcher are dropped indiscriminately but always positively, nay flatteringly. Only once does he mention Marx - when he continues to perpetrate the Stalinist misquotation 'from each according to his work' to back up his argument about the virtues of self-management. The picture that emerges from the mish-mash is of an economic set-up quasi Keynesian (workers spending "surplus money" on consumer goods and investing in state bonds), quasi self-managed (something like Yugoslavia where "The workers get rid of those whose work is not up to the mark ... think of improvements ... immediately production goes up. ..This is the result of genuine involvement, of feeling that you are the master of your own workplace.) and quasi Thatcherite - with workers holding shares in their workplace and living on credit, the value of which Aganbegyan cannot underestimate. Referring to the West he remarks admiringly, "... at any given time, everybody is in debt, and so must work harder to pay back the money they have borrowed."

It is difficult to believe that this man really thinks that perestroika can be equated with NEP - which he argues was the basis for the building of socialism but which was abandoned by Stalin. Any genuine Marxist can tell him that NEP was regarded by Lenin as a retreat BACKWARDS TO CAPITALISM which would be triumphant if there was not an international revolution to save the Russian proletarian revolution. - But in any case Aganbegyan is patently not interested in putting up much of a pretence that Russia is anything other than capitalist. If anyone should still have any doubts we recommend their reading the final chapter, "Will the Soviet Economy Open Up?"

The answer, of course, is "Yes". But the extent to which the Russian bourgeoisie is planning to revive and extend its international economic role makes fascinating reading. Briefly, the strategy is to expand the role of the rouble from being a "realistically valued" domestic currency (when price-fixing by the state is finally abandoned) to a convertible currency for trade with the rest of Comecon and eventually for the rouble to be fully convertible internationally. The prospect of this is seen a sign of the potential strength, not the weakness of the Russian economy. Clearly the plan is for Russian capital to emerge as a fully-fledged part of the international economy with its own zone of influence (extending from the old Comecon countries to the EEC) via the rouble. Eventually it aims to become part of the standard international trade institutions such as GATT and for one-tenth

of her annual rise in national income to come from foreign trade. Convertibility of the rouble will allow Russian finance capital to expand its international role and Aganbegyan stresses the need for Russia and the other 'socialist' countries to export capital and become part of the multinational set-up. All this is set against the background of the declining role of the dollar and the US economy and the rise of the ECU/mark and the yen, each with their own zone of influence. Our visionary ends with a picture of a revived Russian imperialism which will be dependant for its world position, to quote Count Witte, not on "the number of its guns but in the stability of its currency". Convertibility is the international acceptance of a national currency". (p.233)

What are the chances of this audacious plan succeeding? Despite the increases in labour productivity (4.7% in 1988), profits (5% in 1987), exports (3% in the 1st half of 1988) and decreased production costs (over 2½ fold in industry) quoted by Aganbegyan he himself admits that "the majority of Soviet families do not feel that perestroika has resulted in any real change". Yet there is little sign of the consumerist carrots becoming available to Russian workers. Rather the opposite. Moreover, as the author also admits, the planned schedule for perestroika is falling more and more behind in reality. This year, according to the plan, prices are supposed to be de-regulated - which would mean massive price increases for the working class on top of the existing shortages and poor quality. So far perestroika has only meant greater hardship for the Russian working class. Aganbegyan doesn't explain the delays in implementing perestroika apart from the inertia inherited from the "period of stagnation". Gorbachev, however, must be only too well aware that the future of perestroika depends on how much more the Russian working class is prepared to take.

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We have recently received the following donations from sympathisers. We gratefully acknowledge these contributions without which our work could not continue.

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We have many projects such as pamphlets which, due to lack of cash, have not yet been printed. We are therefore using these donations to launch an APPEAL FUND to enable us to carry out this work. Please make out all cheques or (if abroad) international money orders to "CWO Publications" and send to our London address.

## "LIVING MARXISM" OR DEAD NATIONALISM?

policy of the bloc, which would unite Irish capitalism tomorrow if it could

be assured of political stability and discreetly dump one million loyalists. The British Army is policing Ulster for Western imperialism, not proping up the Unionist statelet, which is gone forever. That the RCP can talk of 'national liberation' when the capitalists of Eastern Europe are graphically illustrating that they cannot survive without scrambling under the umbrella of one imperialist bloc or another, shows their ignorance, not only of Marxism, but of reality. The CWO is hostile to any element which backs up the capitalist policy of DIVIDE AND CONQUER in Ireland. This includes the RCP.

\* \* \* \* \*

For contact with the CWO in Ireland write as follows;

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\* \* \* \* \*



# workersVOICE

COMMUNIST • WORKERS • ORGANISATION

## "LIVING MARXISM" OR DEAD NATIONALISM?

No one with even a passing interest in left-wing literature can have failed to have noticed the arrival of "Living Marxism" over the past year or so. Officially the monthly review of the self-styled Revolutionary Communist Party, the influence of the journal has in fact spread far beyond that of the group, and is now more prominent on bookstalls even than "Marxism Today", of which it is in many ways a copy. The obvious difference between the two is the "harder", more uncompromising political content of "Living Marxism", reflecting its origins in Trotskyism. Surely socialists must applaud the success of the new magazine, especially in the face of the supposed domination of society by right-wing ideas?

The answer to this is an unequivocal NO. The growth in the circulation of "Living Marxism", and the less dramatic growth in the RCP itself, has unfortunately nothing to do with socialism. Rather this has come about by the disaffection of demoralised Labourists, mixed with a healthy number of petty-bourgeois, radicalised by the intensity of the current economic and social crisis. The RCP appeals to the latter especially because of the "revolutionary" veneer it brings to marginalist politics eg: its concentration on gay rights, anti-racism, women's liberation etc.

It is a real pity that lack of space means we must select for criticism just one of the pillars of shit upon which "Living Marxism" and the RCP is built. But in the position of the national question in general, and Ireland in particular, we can find a good illustration of the fact that the group is not founded in Marxism at all, but upon left-wing liberalism, ie: the far left of capitalist ideology.

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### GUILTY LIBERAL CONSCIENCE?

Today, in the era of capitalism's totalitarian domination of the globe, east and west; a group's position on the national question is one of the acid tests of its true political nature. Thankfully we have plenty to judge the RCP on, since Ulster and other nationalist struggles, such as South Africa, are rarely of the pages of their magazine. The articles illustrate the difficulty with the national question, namely the way it is generally looked at in an emotional way. The sight of elements in conflict with the British state and its armed forces leads superficial analysts to automatically assume a link between this and the communist struggle against the capitalist class. The sight of bourgeois forces of reaction taking or giving out a pasting can readily produce a gut-reaction.

However, communists do not decide political positions on an emotional but a material basis, that is by posing the question, "In what way does this or that struggle advance, either directly or indirectly, the position of the working class?" That the struggle of the working class has been forgotten in an orgy of British bad conscience is obvious from any reading of "Living Marxism".

It is surely significant that the words working class and socialism hardly get a mention in articles on Ireland. Instead we get phrases like "the Irish people" and "national sovereignty"; language which has been used by the bourgeoisie for centuries to disguise the CLASS nature of its power. An example from the very first issue of the magazine shows how the use of such language is a sign of political opportunism;

"Northern Ireland was an artificial British invention. It was carved out of the Irish Nation (!!!!) to secure Britain's influence. Lacking any rational or national basis, the new statelet relied on extreme measures to survive."

One would be hard pressed to hear this crap at the most tear-soaked Republican funeral! To begin with, what the hell is the Irish nation? For Marxists the 'nation' represents the organised national bourgeoisie; it is of no concern to workers if that gets carved up. Secondly, Marxists rarely admit to history taking place without a rational basis, and certainly the partition of Ireland was one of the more rational events we have witnessed. If a lesson in its material basis is needed we refer them to the last issue of Workers Voice (No. 49: available from CWO addresses) The RCP must admit to the most odious political opportunism, some of which borders on the obscene. For example in the same article in issue one they talk of how

the Provisional IRA "redeemed" Republican honour in the 70's, but they never mention the "honourable" knee-capper, no warning pub-bomber or sectarian assassin. Their adoration of Sinn Fein and the IRA naturally leads them to support the latter's attacks on the British working class civilian population, and apologise for its sectarian attacks on Protestant workers in Ulster, who are offered the perspective of supporting their own destruction for the glory of the Irish flag. Such attacks are the inevitable by-product of nationalist ideologies which subordinate class divisions to national inter-class unity.

What the RCP, and others on the capitalist left, have failed to understand is that you don't have to be a pacifist or a supporter of the states "anti-terrorist" ideology to despise the IRA. This feeling flows from ones class hatred of the bourgeoisie, with whom the Provos share their ideological justification, no matter what "socialist" credentials they attempt to tack on to their reactionary programme. If Marxism does have an EMOTIONAL driving force it is to be found in this hatred of the powers which run the world today, and not in some middle-class guilt-trip over the crimes of British imperialism.

### NATIONAL LIBERATION?

Through the pages of "Living Marxism" the RCP supports the Republicans in their struggle to free Ireland from British interference, but they have consistently failed to define what gain their would be for the Irish working class in having capitalism organised on a 32-county basis (as envisaged by Sinn Fein) rather than in two states, as at present. In the same way they cannot say how the cause of socialism is advanced by having black capitalism in South Africa, or Sandinista capitalism in Nicaragua etc. This is because in each case they do not have a socialist perspective, but a capitalist one, based on the ideology of 'national liberation'.

In an astonishingly crass article in the January "Living Marxism" (Ireland's Identity Crisis) the RCP speak of "a true anti-imperialist Irish nationalism", and of the fight against British imperialism. Quite apart from the fact that it devalues the Marxist concept to talk of BRITISH imperialism at all in the modern epoch (the UK having long ago been swept under the hegemony of the US-dominated Western bloc) it is quite wrong to assume it possible for a united Ireland to exercise independence under the conditions of modern imperialism, no matter how radical. More to the point, not only is the Republican movement not a threat to imperialism in Ireland, it is ironic to note that it is objectively in agreement with the

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