

workers voice

No 51 April/May 1990

The National Question in the USSR

End of Empire?



South Africa - despite the reforms state violence continues - p.4

Also inside

Iraq and British Imperialism	2
The collapse of Thatcherism	3
East German Unity	6
The RCP and the Eastern Bloc	7
Republicanism and Socialism in Ireland	8

Seventy three years ago the victorious working class revolution in Russia did not just inherit a country it won an empire. The Russian Empire of the Tsars had been mainly gained during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Even after Alexander II sold Alaska to the USA in the 1870s he still ruled one sixth of the land area of the planet. The new (and the old) colonies were subjected to a ruthless programme of Russification. In Russia proper this extended to pogroms against national and religious minorities but particularly the Jews. The Ukrainian, Byelorussian and Lithuanian languages were banned and in Poland all teaching was done in Russian. This continued until the fall of the Romanov dynasty in 1917.

How did the revolutionaries of 1917 face this situation? The supposedly democratic Provisional Government of Kerensky had ignored the demands of the Ukrainians and the Finns after the February Revolution of 1917. What would the Bolsheviks who overthrew Kerensky do? Lenin had already noted before the First World War "the defect common to the socialists of the dominant nations (the English and the Russian): failure to understand their socialist duties towards the downtrodden nations". Thus one of the first acts of the new Soviet government in October 1917 was "The Declaration of the Rights of the People of Russia". It was based on four principles.

1. EQUALITY AND SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLES OF RUSSIA.
 2. THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLES OF RUSSIA TO FREE SELF-DETERMINATION, UP TO SECESSION AND FORMATION OF AN INDEPENDENT STATE.
 3. ABOLITION OF ALL NATIONAL AND NATIONAL-RELIGIOUS PRIVILEGES AND RESTRICTIONS.
 4. FREE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL MINORITIES AND ETHNIC GROUPS INHABITING RUSSIA"
- (Y.Akhapkin First Decrees of Soviet Power p.32)

Replying to criticism (mainly from Rosa Luxemburg, whose general opposition to national liberation struggles in the present era of capitalism we support) that this decree simply gave the national bourgeoisies an excuse to split away from the Russian workers' state, Lenin argued from a class standpoint.

"We are told that Russia will disintegrate and split up into separate republics but we have no reason to fear this. We have nothing to fear, whatever the number of independent republics. The important thing for us is not where the state border runs, but whether or not the working people of all nations remain allied in their struggle against the bourgeoisie, irrespective of nationality."

In fact there was little the Bolsheviks could do to stop international imperialism promoting the local bourgeoisie in each area of the old Russian Empire. With the international working class facing defeat on all fronts, imperialism once again dictated its terms. Thus the Germans propped up an "independent" Finland and Ukraine, the British propped up the Mensheviks in Georgia and the French backed Pilsudski in Poland. Finally the international banditry was completed by the Peace of Paris in 1919 which recognised some of these nations as well as the German creations of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

The latter only enjoyed twenty years of independence. The Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939 gave Stalin the right to reincorporate the Baltic states into the Russian Empire. Stalin was no stranger to invasion having forcibly restored Georgia to Moscow's rule (against Lenin's clearly stated wishes). The Second World War also saw the restoration of

the old Russian border in Poland which was lost in 1920. Despite the fact that the 1936 Constitution retained the "right of secession" this was never attempted in practice in the Stalinist Soviet Union (it should also be noted that the USA fought a civil war in the last century to specifically prevent the Southern states seceding).

So is Gorbachev today abandoning the "Great Russian chauvinism" that Lenin accused Stalin of? Is he, as he repeatedly claims following the path of Lenin? The answer on all counts is "no". Lenin was leading the Russian Revolution at a time when the working class was feeling its way in discovering its own forms of rule, Gorbachev is the leader of one of the two major imperialist states to emerge from the Second World War. Lenin put his faith in the international working class to save the isolated Soviet republic. Gorbachev pins his hopes on Western technology and the international imperialist concert of nations.

Continued on page 2

H.M. Govt — Wanted For Poll Tax Fraud

The Poll Tax is a massive attack on the working class. Its introduction means a shifting of the burden of local taxation from the bosses to the working class. But this shift is only part of the attack. According to the *Guardian* (12th March 1990), the average household will pay 33% more in this year's Poll Tax than in last year's rates. Because the bosses tend to live in the better houses in their society, this average figure hides a reduction in the bosses' share of the burden and an even greater increase in the working class' share. So the average working class family will face an increase far in excess of 33%.

What the Poll Tax was for

Back in the mists of time, when the bosses still believed in the Thatcher dream, the Tories thought up a scheme which would forever banish the Labour Party to the fringes of capitalism's political spectrum. Believing that the shift which had temporarily reversed the fortunes of British capital was just the start of something big (given enough gin, anyone will believe what's in their interest to believe!) rather than the end of something pitifully small, they looked forward to a home- and share-owning aristocracy of labour which would vote Tory out of gratitude. To speed the creation of this aristocracy, a wonderful device was designed: the Poll Tax, sometimes known as the "Community Charge".

The idea was this: the members of the the property owning democracy, including the hoped for aristocracy of labour, would have a common interest in a low Poll Tax because their children would get into the best schools and they

could afford to pay for their own text books once they got there, they would be materially unaffected by council rents or lack of repairs to council houses, their elder relatives could be cared for privately, whereas the reverse would be the case for those excluded from the property-owners through their "fecklessness" in being unemployed or poorly-paid. If the Tories could have created this permanent division in the working class they would have achieved one of the bosses' historic ambitions, and would, no doubt, have used this division to push down the living standards of both segments of the working class. If, in addition, they had been able to identify the Labour Party with the disenfranchised, they would have succeeded in identifying the historic interest of the whole bourgeoisie with their own interest.

However, all this depended on the gradual introduction of the Poll Tax. This is why the Tax was initially intended to be introduced over ten years.

Capitalism's crisis wakes up the Tory Dreamers

But reality has a way of intruding on fantasies built on fortuitous accidents: British capitalism may well have been felled, in the short term, from Thatcher's restructuring of the economy with its greater reliance on financial activity, but it is not immune from world capitalism's unavoidable crisis. Finance capital appears to be profitable independently of industrial production and this illusion is strengthened when national capitals are considered apart from their global interconnection. Nevertheless, wealth does not spring into existence by a miracle wrought by the mere existence of a banking system and a stock exchange. Behind the apparent independence of financial in-

Continued on page 4

Editorial.

British Hypocrisy v The Butcher of Baghdad

Lord Macauley, the nineteenth century historian and politician once wrote that there was nothing more ridiculous than the sight of the British public indulging in a fit of moral indignation. Had he seen the storm over the death penalty on Farzad Bazoft orchestrated by "Dirty Don" Treford, editor of the "Observer" he might have added that there was also nothing more nauseating.

There will be many innocent victims of the British press who will consider that we should send more of its lying lackeys to Baghdad to get what they deserve. Obviously the Government thinks that at least one is dispensable, especially if he happens to be born somewhere foreign like Iran. Having signalled its disgust to the Iraqi Government by withdrawing its ambassador (but not its staff) the entire state apparatus (including Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition) united to propose nothing more than a slap on the wrist to Saddam Hussein. And just when "Dirty Don" was using his newspaper to work up a real head of steam in defence of this innocent journalist the Government punctured his cylinder by releasing the news that not only had Bazoft been a rather inept journalist but an incompetent robber of a building society as well. And then all that was needed was a whispering campaign from "experts" on spying like Rupert Allason and Chapman Pincher before the whole world was half-believing that Bazoft really was working for both British and Israeli intelligence (only the latter was asserted by the Iraqi state). Collapse of the morally indignant party. Ah well, Bazoft was only a freelance reporter for the Observer after all.

"OUR VALUES", OUR TRADE

Mrs Thatcher has been sonorously (a Saatchi and Saatchi voice operation later) going on for weeks about how the collapse of the Russian Empire is a victory for "our values". These she claims to be "freedom" and "democracy". Whatever the increasing hollowness of this claim at home (Guildford 4, Birmingham 6, whilst the right to strike, Habeas Corpus, trial by jury, the right to silence have all gone or are under threat) surely the British Government which, as Mrs Thatcher told the French President, invented the ideas of democracy and freedom would

stick out for them against a tinpot tyrant like Saddam Hussein?

It will come as no shock to the readers of this paper that the British Government, mightily embarrassed though it was, would not. The excuse that no government in the so-called Third World has a good record also won't wash as a defence. The present Iraqi Ba'athist regime has the worst record in the world including such horror regimes as El Salvador. Torture, mass deportations, public executions and the use of chemical weapons against its "own" Kurdish population are not isolated events. Saddam Hussein, with the support of the US, declared the Gulf War against Iran and has been able to rely on Western connivance ever since. This has not meant that his regime has become any less repressive internally. Rather the contrary. After the Bazoft affair it was announced that Iraqi males can now legally kill any female member of their family SUSPECTED of committing adultery. Perhaps Mrs Thatcher thinks that this is the ultimate way to strengthen "our Victorian values"? Today, with 2000 British citizens working in Iraq and numerous trade ties (despite Iraq's continuously bad record as a debt defaulter) the British Government decided that the principles of trade demanded the trading of principles. And this from a Government that claims never to "trim" or do U-turns.

Instead the British and US have begun a systematic campaign against Iraq which aims to bring Saddam Hussein more closely under the control of Western imperialism. The sting operation against the Iraqi Embassy in London trying to get modern technology for Iraq's nuclear programme is part of this pressure. Hitherto Saddam has been able to count on the West turning a blind eye to his activities (his poison gas attacks against the Iranians was after all to defend Western civilisation) but now that the West wants to stabilise the Middle East they need to either oust Saddam or to force him to sign a lasting peace with Iran (that war having ruined Iran it has now served its purpose for the West). It should not be forgotten in the present outrage against Iraq that the real butchery in the Middle East is committed by those imperialist powers who supply the weapons and the "advice" for their own interests.

Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia and Georgia.

The nationalist ferment in the periphery of the Soviet Empire is not just a product of glasnost. The economic factors which produced glasnost have also whipped up nationalist desires for independence from paying dues to Moscow. The hollowness of such "independence" has been underlined by the events of the last few weeks. Since Sajudis, the Lithuanian nationalist movement which won governmental power, declared Lithuania independent on March 12th there has been an intensification of pressure by Gorbachev. With no sources of energy, no foreign currency reserves and no standing army the Lithuanians only hope was that the Western powers would come to its aid. Gorbachev has said he will not use force but only because he is unlikely to have to do so. The USA, in particular, the President has turned a deaf ear to the pleas of the Lithuanian leader, Landsbergis. True, Congress did pass a resolution of support for Lithuania (Chicago has the second largest Lithuanian population in the world!) but this has provided only momentary consolation for Sajudis. It is quite clear that on the bigger issues of world politics Gorbachev has the support of the West and they do not want him to be replaced.

Gorbachev has made it clear that Lithuania can have "independence" but this decolonisation will take place on Russian terms and will cost the Lithuanians a heavy price. In short, as Rosa Luxemburg argued almost a century ago, in the era of imperialism the idea of "national liberation" is a myth for lesser nations. Whilst they might gain nominal political independence in the last resort they have to submit to the political and economic interests of one or other imperialism. Bush has made it quite clear that Lithuania is still in the Russian sphere of influence.

Gorbachev's tough talking and more resolute action over this issue is less about preventing secession and more about ensuring that the form of independence which does take place does so on terms acceptable to Moscow. Whilst he could contemplate the loss of Eastern Europe he could not see the historic Russian empire pass over to another imperialist power. This is the message that has gone out, not only to Lithuania but also to Estonia, Latvia and Georgia. It is a dangerous game for him but the climbdown by Landsbergis over the defence force the Lithuanians were setting up indicates that they are being gradually forced to the negotiating table. It is unlikely that the Estonians or the Latvians will be as confrontational when their turn to go for independence comes (especially as they have bigger Russian-speaking minorities). Thus "the end of empire" of the USSR is a bit like the loss of colonies experienced by France and Britain and other European imperialist powers. And like them the USSR is not becoming any less imperialist but will be seeking new ways of promoting its imperialist interest with its former colonies. Thus, though we are seeing the end of empire we are not seeing the end of imperialism.

It is impossible to predict precisely how this process will finish up. Gorbachev is obviously hoping that a new federation can be constructed (commonwealth instead of empire?) but he is no longer in control of the process he launched. Furthermore the factor which promoted that process in the first place, the economic paralysis of the Soviet economy shows no sign of any early improvement. It will be how perestroika proceeds that determines the future of the Russian Empire.

Continued from page 1

The End of Empire?

In fact Gorbachev's policy owes more to Stalin's "socialism in one country" than to anything else. Stalin, having failed to interest Britain and France in an alliance against Germany did the deal which gave him the Baltic states and Poland and left him a free hand to attack Finland. Soviet apologists (including Trotskyists) have always justified these invasions as defensive operations only but that is a justification used by all imperialist powers. However, there is no disputing that the USSR is a weak imperialist power in the sense that it can only expand by military means. More dynamic economies (i.e. the USA) could make a crusade against military occupation of colonies because it could dominate them more effectively by economic means. Thus it forced Britain and France to abandon most of their colonies after the Second World War. The weakness of the USSR was brought home to Stalin at the end of the Second World war when a ruined Soviet Union faced a revitalised USA. Having been given the right to garrison Eastern Europe Stalin turned them into satellites, which were not only profitable until the 1970s, but also acted as military buffer against further attacks from the West.

But once the economic crisis hit the stagnating economies of the East, once the profitability of them declined, and once the

USSR was hit by an economic crisis even more acute than that in the West then the costs of extended military operations had to be abandoned. This was the background to the elevation of Gorbachev. To solve the economic crisis he needed to lower military expenditure and to attract western technology. But to achieve both these he had to reduce international tension and suspicions. Hence the Gorbachev disarmament initiatives, hence the abandonment of defence of the Eastern satellites. The dismantling of the Warsaw Pact and making the rouble convertible will be the green light to the West that "the evil empire" has not only thrown in the Cold War towel (which it did some time ago) but is ripe for investment. Gorbachev hopes that the crisis in the West will be sufficiently acute for him to win some cheap Western technology to complete the restructuring of the Soviet economy. In the longer term, he also hopes to play on Western divisions over the spectre of the revival of an independent German imperialism to enter into new alliances in the future which will break the present isolation of the USSR.

But it is not part of his scheme for the Russian Empire to break up. The invasion of Azerbaijan by professional KGB units shows that the Kremlin will resist any attempt to dismantle the Russian Empire. Which brings us to the present situation in

PUBLICATIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL BUREAU

The Communist Workers Organisation is the British affiliate of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party. Other publications of the Bureau are:

In Italian **Battaglia Comunista** and **Prometeo**

In Bengali **Lal Pataka** (Red Flag)

In French **Revue Comuniste**

For details write to the CWO address

The Crumbling of Thatcherism:

The End of All the Old Illusions?

- * 10% devaluation of sterling against other major currencies in the past year;
- * declining productivity (for the first time since 1986);
- * a first-time ever trade deficit in "invisibles" (income from overseas investment, banking, tourism, etc.);
- * UK inflation higher than its main competitors (officially 7.25% and rising).

is always harping on about and which, according to Thatcher apparently doesn't exist in Russia? In this society where 'consumer needs' are largely determined by advertising hype you don't have to believe in the plot theory of history to sense that our political opinions are equally being manipulated. Take the opinion polls, for example. These are sophisticated means of thought control, of defining issues safely within the confines of the existing system. Individual 'citizens' are stopped in the streets and asked questions which assume the present set-up is eternal. So, on the basis of answers to questions like, "If there were a general election tomorrow which party would you vote for?" and "Mrs Thatcher has been Prime Minister for 10 years and leader of her party for 14. Do you think she should step down?" the public is being "informed" that Labour is currently more popular than the Tories and Thatcher is especially unpopular. Hardly surprising, given the poll tax, and the increasing cost of living. What we should be asking is "Why the spate of opinion polls reiterating the same message at this particular juncture?"

Imagine, if you can, a different kind of poll where the issues are not defined in terms of national politics and the parliamentary merry-go-round. There might be questions like: "During the past 20 years none of the existing parties has found a solution to the problems created by the economic crisis. Do you think it's time the international working class found its own alternative?" Such questions would of course be dismissed by the media and political pundits as outrageously unscientific and biased. Yet they wouldn't be any more biased than what passes now for social 'science' but which in reality is only part of the systematic propaganda machine employed by the ruling class to maintain the legitimacy of parliamentary democracy. And make no mistake, the polls are not simply used to gauge 'public opinion', they help create it. In so doing they reinforce the myth that society is simply composed of individuals, not divided into classes. They aim to hide the reality of the class struggle in which the working class can only defend its interests by struggling against the capitalist class whose aim is to find the best means possible of exploiting their labour power.

THE LABOUR PARTY: A REMINDER

Of course, the media inform us, such 'extremist' views have finally been discredited in the 1980s and especially now that 'communism' has collapsed in Eastern Europe. Even the Labour Party has had to recognise this 'fact' but now that it has ditched its extreme socialist policies and quelled its 'loony left' it can be considered a realistic possibility for government.

But, wait a minute. Since when has Labour ever had any really socialist policies for it to be able to ditch? The short answer is "NEVER". Right from the start Labour has always existed to defend the interests of British capitalism as a whole. The Party's biggest claim to be socialist used to be its support for nationalisation (the famous Clause 4). But the transfer of ownership from private to state bosses has nothing to do with socialism. It's true that Labour believed that the transfer of state funds could be used to save bankrupt British industries in the early days of the crisis but today Labour has had to recognise the extent of the crisis and acknowledge that British capital as a whole simply cannot generate enough funds to do this. In practice Labour has accepted the Tory's con of "people's capitalism" and ditched their own con that state control under capitalism = "the people's" control of industry.

It's now over ten years since the last Labour Government and it's worth glancing back at their record when they were supposedly bent on implementing 'dogmatic' or 'extreme' socialism. In 1979 'public opinion' swung towards the Conservatives not because Labour was implementing socialism (it wasn't even implementing its own manifesto) but because the Callaghan Government was failing to quell working class resistance to its austerity policies. Wage cuts had been introduced via a contract with the unions to freeze wage 'increases' at 5% or 10% while inflation rose, to 20%. Public spending cuts (particularly in

the NHS) matched those later made by the Tories in 1979-80 and it was a Labour government which oversaw the re-emergence of mass unemployment (which reached an unprecedented post-war height of 1.5m under Callaghan). For the British capitalist class Labour had not only failed to control the working class, their tired old policies of more and more state support for industry and import controls were proving an ineffective means of restoring profitability. The situation called for a drastic rethink. Today, as it becomes more and more apparent that deregulation and opening up the economy to foreign capital has led nowhere, the media is prepared to present Labour as a viable alternative to Thatcher.

This has nothing to do with Labour having become less 'socialist' or Kinnock's quashing of the 'extremist' fringes. (The media could easily resurrect the 'loony left' bogey if it wanted too - over Militant's role in the anti-poll tax campaign, for example. Clearly it doesn't want too at the moment.) What the current spate of opinion polls reveals is that the British ruling class want a change in the way the economy is managed - either by Tories changing their policies or else a Labour government at the next election.

THE ALTERNATIVE

What they don't reveal is the extent of workers' disaffection with the whole gamut of capitalist parties. The problem is that the workers do not know what they do want. They still will turn out to vote for Labour (although half the working class regularly abstain) to get rid of the Tories but there is no socialist party which stands for a working class programme. The formation of such a party is not hindered by all kinds of capitalist reformists posing as revolutionary, usually from the Trotskyist traditions. These organisations recruit the most conscious of the working class and then proceed to instruct them on this or that tactical necessity to support the Labour Party or stand in parliamentary elections. It is not surprising that many of them soon abandon political commitment. Real revolutionaries like the CWO are working to form a nucleus of politically clear and committed individuals. Our task today is to enlarge that nucleus in order to provide the basis for the growth of a working class organisation. This will be the inevitable outcome of the ever-worsening capitalist crisis. We urge our readers to become a more active part of that process.

WORKERS VOICE READERS MEETING

Real Communism in Eastern Europe

Place: Mechanics Institute, Princess St.,
Manchester

Time: 8.00 p.m.

Date: Thursday, 26th April.

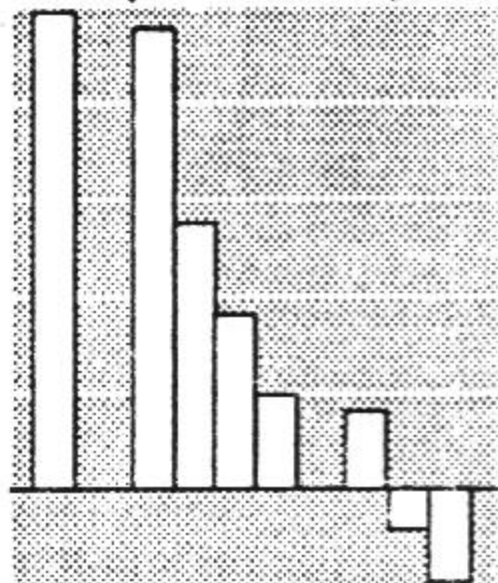
The Politics of Illusion: from back page

Overall this book is useful source material on a subject (republican socialism) that's treatment by the British and Irish leftists has been disgracefully scant. They have preferred political dishonesty or the wholesale swallowing of Provo lies in order to form an opportunistic alliance. However at £7.95 it's not cheap and it crucially lacks an analysis of the weakness of republicanism's main project, the national question. Perhaps you could get the best of both worlds by borrowing it from the library and using the money for a subscription to Worker's Voice!

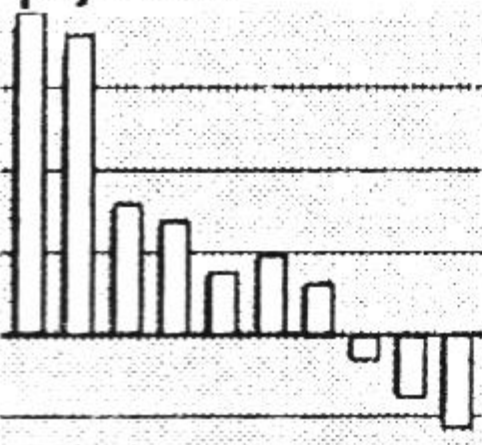
For contact with the CWO in Ireland write as follows;

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

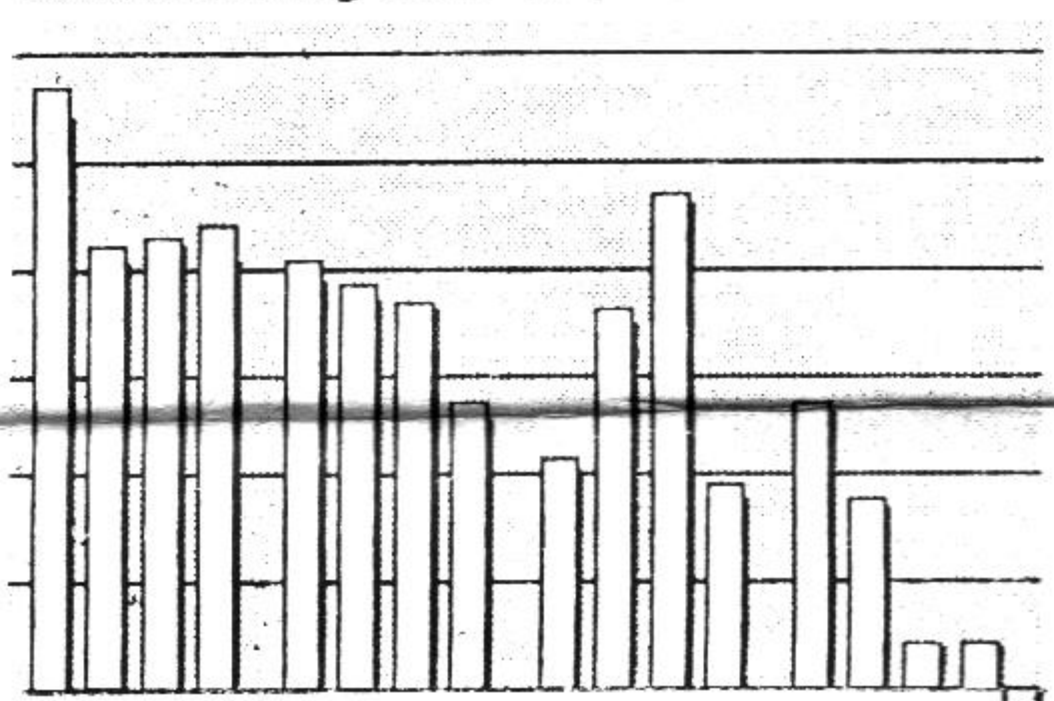
UK productivity



Britain's balance of payments



UK's shrinking trade surplus in "invisibles"



It was against this background that John Major decided upon his 'do-nothing' Budget. In truth there was little he could do unless it was to even further weaken his Government's claim to have set the British economy on its feet again. (He himself argued only last November that "the economy enters the 1990s in an incomparably better shape than it entered the 1980s".) This claim rings even more hollow against the constant revising downwards of official predictions for this year. Already the officially expected growth rates for 1990 have been modified from a feeble 1.25% to a mere 1% while an actual fall in fixed investment is now predicted. All this is bad news for the British capitalist class: both its industrial and financial sections. Of course the Tories have never promised anything to the working class as such but to the 'electorate as a whole' Major could only promise a rise in unemployment, no change in mortgage rates, rising inflation (until it 'bottomed out') and a threat against anybody who demands higher wages to keep up with this. (All this when the poll tax is being introduced in England and Wales and at a time when there is more household debt in Britain than anywhere else in Europe.)

'PUBLIC OPINION'

As British capitalism slides into another recession, this time with a much smaller industrial base, Thatcherism has run out of favour with the ruling class. Suddenly the new-look Labour Party has risen to unheard of heights in the opinion polls. 'Public opinion', the media tells us, is now saying that Thatcher has gone too far. This was reflected in the Mid-Staffs by-election which revealed the historic depths of unpopularity to which the Tories have sunk.

Yet what is this 'public opinion' the media

Mandela: The Saviour of South African Capitalism

The release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC and other black nationalist organisations on 11th February 1990 was the official signing of apartheid's death warrant. The particular type of capitalist exploitation organised under the apartheid system will, in the coming period, be swept away to make way for the so-called "democratic" system which is the norm throughout the West. Apartheid is of no further use to capitalism. The chief problem which capitalism faces is achieving this transition without allowing the country to descend into chaos and civil war, which after 40 years of barbaric oppression remains a real possibility. The white liberals are clearly unable to achieve this transition without the support of the African nationalists and it is for this reason that the ANC has been legalised and Mandela released from prison. After serving 28 years for treason, Mandela has been catapulted to the centre of South African politics as the man of the hour, the man to save South African capitalism. How has this come about?

80s PROVE APARTHEID'S BANKRUPTCY

Since the uprising in Soweto in 1976 the South African capitalist class has been divided into two main factions, those who favoured continuing with apartheid at all costs, and those who argued for the establishment of non-racial "democratic" capitalist exploitation. The advent of de Klerk to the presidency indicates the second

faction has now achieved power, but this has not been an easy process. Since 1976 a decade and a half of persisting with apartheid have exposed its complete bankruptcy and led the ruling class into its present cul-de-sac. Military adventures have ended in defeat, internal repression has failed to prevent massive social unrest and the economy is in ruins.

After the settlement in Zimbabwe the South African regime tried to resist change by using its economic strength, and when this failed, by using its military power. The military adventures in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho and Angola have been well publicised. Although the regime liked to present them as great victories, they were in fact part of a slow defeat. The inglorious hauling down of the South African flag in Windhoek, capital of Namibia, on 21st March, 1990 was a dramatic acceptance of this fact. The wars just became too expensive and by 1989 the Angola/Namibia war alone was costing the regime over \$1 billion annually.

Within the country repression had failed to quell the unrest, though the dead were now counted in thousands. After five years of troops in the townships and the imposition of a state of emergency, rebellion is still boiling over. As we go to press a further 13 people have been killed by the police in the township of Sebokeng. A further example of the regime's failure is the carnage in Natal province where the police have for 5 years staked a feud between black factions by

arming and assisting the thugs of chief Buthelezi's Inkatha movement. The violence began when the bosses used scabs of the Inkatha union to break a bitter strike at the Sarmcol rubber factory in Howick in 1985. The scabs were protected and armed by the police and the feud between them and the strikers union federation, COSATU, and the UDF followed. This violence has now reached the point where 2500 people have been killed in the last 12 months alone and is now spilling over into the centres of the cities with shootouts occurring in broad daylight. The regime's attempts to divide and rule have led to lawlessness and anarchy on a scale sufficient to scare off capital and reduce profits.

The regime has also failed to tame the class struggle. The rail strike which ended in January this year left at least 27 workers dead and over 10 million pounds of rolling stock destroyed. This is a typical example of the violence of the class struggle.

It is, however, in the economy that the apartheid regime has failed most miserably. The early 80's saw a sharp fall in the price of gold from \$613 to \$350 per ounce and South Africa had to borrow heavily. \$1.1bn was borrowed from the IMF and loans from US banks rose to \$4.6bn by 1983. The GNP actually decreased in both 1982 and 1983 and in late 1985 the international banks led by Chase Manhattan refused to roll over short term loans of approximately \$13bn out of the foreign debt which was \$20bn. The regime declared a moratorium on its debts and the value of the Rand fell. Since then there has been a flight of capital from the country and at least \$13bn has been withdrawn. South Africa today has a growth rate of only 2% an inflation rate of 15%. The regime now needs an impossibly high balance of surplus surplus to repay its debts and a constant flow of oil, high tech imports and skilled labour. The international bourgeoisie has finally

Poll Tax Fraud

Continued from page 1

stitutions from production there lie mechanisms for draining value from production, such as interest on loans and the export of capital. Internal to capitalist production there is the tendency for the rate of profit to decline, and this means that the financial institutions' sources of value also tend to dry up. Manifestations of this are debt rescheduling and actual defaults, which have an obvious effect on the profits of the lending institutions.

The British effects of all this are clear: Maggie's miracle no longer works. Not only that, the bosses have know this for a long time, and have been hoping for a subsidiary miracle to bail them out. Of late, they have been aware that this is not and will not be forthcoming: hence the Lawson resignation. As if the high interest rates were not enough, Britain has had its first ever deficit in invisibles (i.e., financial services, etc.). For a bourgeoisie that has staked so much on invisibles, this is not just worrying, it amounts to a death knell for the government whose policy this was.

In a crisis the bosses are unanimous on what has to be done: make the workers pay. There are many tried and trusted weapons in their armoury that they can use to do this. The Tories, however are going to try out there new weapon.

What the Poll Tax is for

Faced with the intensified crisis, one of the things the bosses need to do is reduce the burden of state spending on business profits. This can be done either by reducing state spending or by making the working class pay more of the burden. Both of these methods are attacks on the working class: the first because what is cut are the services that workers use and the workers in those services are made redundant, and the second because it involves effective wage cuts.

The Tories have decided to use the Poll Tax for this. They have reduced its phasing-in period from ten years to overnight in the hope that they can use it to blame "Labour's high spending councils" for the general crisis of capitalism. They have even gone so far as to try to recreate last century's rotten boroughs (Victorian values with a vengeance?) in Wandsworth (Poll Tax £148) and Westminster (£195). In reality, they have cut central government grants (but not in Wandsworth or Westminster!) to make workers pay for the crisis. The general effect of this is made worse by the high interest rates on local government loans - £4.7 million to be paid by Ipswich alone (Guardian (9th March 1990).

The Labour Party, as a loyal party of capitalism, not surprisingly resents a tax aimed at marginalising it as being responsible for all the ills of that system. More importantly, this Tax is both extremely unpopular and unambiguously identified with the Tories. If Labour wants to be taken seriously as an alternative government, it simply has to oppose the Poll Tax. However, if we look more closely at the nature of its opposition, we will see that we are justified in calling it a capitalist party.

Firstly, in its public statements it concentrates exclusively on the "unfairness" of the Tax. We do not, of course, disagree that the Tax is particularly unfair (even by the standards of this "unfair" - i.e., exploitative - society), but we are for workers fighting any attack on their living standards, no matter what form it takes. In a nutshell, we would oppose a 33% increase in rates too. The Labour Party is more concerned with making sure that capitalism gets its 33%, but "fairly".

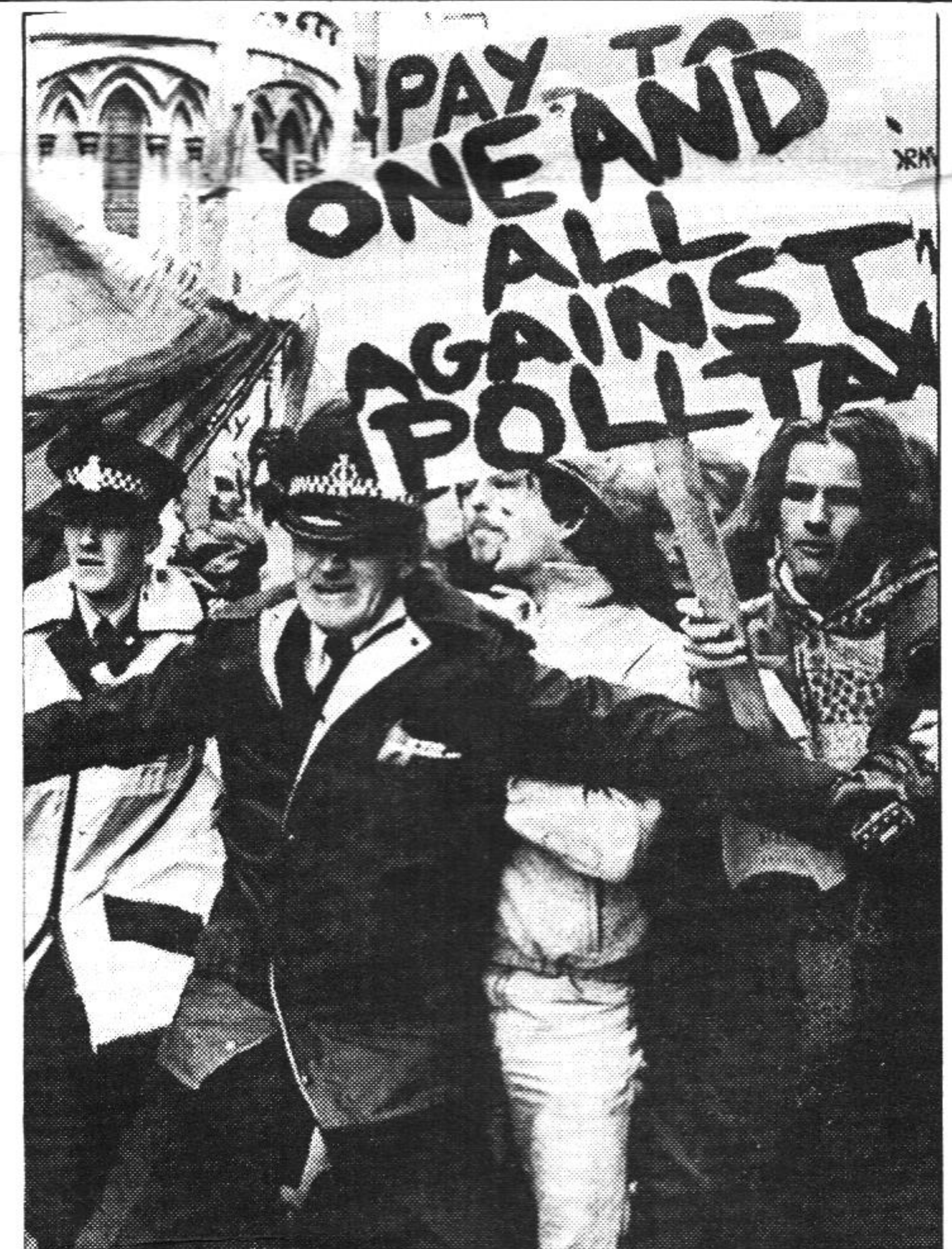
Secondly, how does the Labour Party propose we fight this attack on us? It tells us to wait passively until there is an election, to vote Labour and then wait again until the Labour Party gets around to abolishing the Poll Tax (Jeff Rooker, Labour's former local government spokesman, tells us that his party will take two years to abolish it - Guardian 24th February 1990!).

What does the Labour Party plan for "action" amount to? We pay Poll Tax for two years to a Tory government, while they help that government to collect it, and then we pay it to a Labour government for two more years while they work out a "fairer" way to lower our living standards!

Even if we give the Labour Party the benefit of the doubt, and assume that it is genuinely against the form of the Poll Tax, its actions show that it is far more interested in keeping the working class passive than in defeating the Tax.

Its interest in the passivity of the working class derives from its nature as a capitalist party. Capitalism cannot coexist with a working class which is conscious of its interests and fights for that interest. It becomes nervous when a minority of workers begin to develop that consciousness and seeks to draw those workers back into a belief that their interests can be entrusted to the system. Bourgeois democracy is the tool par excellence for this job.

Every few years we are given a chance to choose which representative of the bosses we want in Parliament. This



is the only time we get to exercise any power over him (and it usually is a man), and the bosses make sure that we only do this as atomised, isolated individuals, unaware of our own power to make collective decisions. When "our" man gets to Parliament, he is under the influence of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie alone. Just to make sure that workers do not have any influence over anything important, Parliament has been reduced to the farce we see on our television screens.

In addition we must defend those workers who refuse to collect the Tax and strike against any bosses who comply with court orders authorising wage deductions for nonpayment.

This may well not be enough. To hit the government where it hurts, we need to hit the bosses who stand behind it. This means strikes directly against the Poll Tax, rather than just against its effects. No doubt, the government will denounce the strikes as being political, and the Labour Party will remind us that such strikes are against the law, but this will only be an attempt to demobilise us. Besides, it is the government which is showing us that politics and our domestic economy are intimately linked!

lost confidence, forcing the government to retreat into a financial siege economy. This can only be a temporary measure for the loss of longer term capital is debilitating the economy as a whole and there is massive unemployment.

U.S. IMPERIALISM FORCES CHANGES

With the Russian disengagement from southern Africa, Western imperialism saw little point in further support for the apartheid regime. The military adventures were actually endangering Western interests in the frontline states, e.g. South African commandos were caught sabotaging Gulf Oil installations in Angola and the destruction of the rail network in Mozambique was disrupting British interests in Zimbabwe. Britain has even sent troops to help Zimbabwean troops protect the rail links. Within South Africa apartheid was restricting profits and endangering the enormous capital investments of the West. Under these circumstances US imperialism took the lead in forcing the regime to accept a Namibian settlement and to ditch apartheid.

ENDING APARTHEID TO SAVE CAPITALISM

The liberal faction of the South African bourgeoisie have since the mid 80's recognised that the only social force able to restore social peace and profits is the ANC. It is for this reason that a stream of eminent persons from the chairman of Anglo-American to academics of Afrikaans universities have been beating a trail to the ANC's door to sound them out about post-apartheid society. They see in the ANC, and in Mandela, the force which can save capitalism. It is for this reason that Mandela has been brought from prison.

Many black workers look to Mandela as the man who will free them from exploitation and hardship. They are greatly deceived.

Since his release Mandela has been at pains to stress his loyalty to the ANC and its objectives as stated in the 1955 Freedom Charter. This charter is a liberal programme spiced with a number of state capitalist proposals. At no stage does this programme express any opposition to capitalism and the exploitation of the working class, rather it aims to make this exploitation democratic and share the spoils amongst a black capitalist class. We cannot do better than let Mandela speak for himself on this,

"The ANC has never at any period of its history advocated a revolutionary change in the economic structure of the country, nor has itever condemned capitalist society." (From Mandela's trial speech 1964)

One thing which Mandela has stated since his release is his continued commitment to the nationalisation of the mines, banks and large industries. Nationalisation, as Engels pointed out over a century ago, does not alter the capitalist nature of production or the laws of capitalism as is now clear from the crisis in the Russian empire. It is simply the introduction of state capitalism and is not a gain for the working class. In fact the ANC's objectives have nothing to do with the working class's interests, they are to use the power of the state to foster a black capitalist class. This is precisely what the Afrikaner nationalist party attempted to do in the 1930's and succeeded in doing after its victory in 1948. The Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie used the state as a vehicle to enable it to accumulate capital and thus to become a fully fledged section of the South African capitalist class. It is precisely this which the ANC proposes. Again we let Mandela speak for himself,

"The break-up and democratisation of these monopolies will open up fresh fields for the development of a prosperous, non-European bourgeois class. For the first time in the

history of this country, the non-Europeans bourgeoisie will have the opportunity to own, in their own name and right, mills and factories, and trade and private enterprise will boom and flourish as never before."

(Mandela 'In our lifetime' 1956 reprinted in "No easy walk to freedom" R First (Ed.) 1965)

Thus the nationalisations proposed in the Freedom Charter, even if they were carried out, and doubt has been cast on this by Mandela's millionaire friend Richard Maponya, would not benefit the working class. Mandela's task is to save South African capitalism and as workers worldwide know this means sacrifices and worse conditions for them.

SOUTH AFRICAN WORKERS

South African workers have no interest in placing themselves in the infantry of the African nationalists. Today's nationalists are tomorrow's bosses. The way forward is for workers to continue their own class struggles for the ending of apartheid and for better pay and conditions; to unify and extend these struggles independently of any negotiations the regime may have with the African nationalists. This struggle should give itself the longer term aim of overthrowing capitalism and building a communist society. The first step on this road is the creation of a political organisation of the most conscious workers fighting only for the interests of the working class. The emancipation of the South African working class is the task of the workers themselves. As elsewhere in the world the talk of democracy and national independence is no more than a diversion to create a new form of slavery for the working class. The release of Mandela and his courting by Western imperialism should already have made that message abundantly clear.

This does not mean that we support the SWP's strategy of forcing the union bureaucracy to start strikes:

"They" [activists] "need to recognise that most workers, still cowed by ten years of defeats under the Tories, aren't confident enough to act without official backing from union leaders."

"That means using every opportunity to step up the pressure on labour movement leaders to demand they match their speeches against the poll tax with calls for action." (Socialist Worker, 24th March 1990)

It is true that many workers lack confidence. It is not true that this lack of confidence can be overcome by using the union bureaucracy. Union bureaucrats only "lead" strikes when they respond to already existing mass pressure from below. And then they lead them to defeat, either directly or by throwing away what was won in struggle at the negotiating table. The last ten years is replete with examples of this, and the ambulance workers case is only the most recent (the bureaucracy, in the shape of Poole, opposed their struggle at first, then "supported" it - but only in words - and finally sold them out).

Meanwhile, the bosses use their own economic power over the government to exercise their dictatorship over society. Parliament functions only to disguise this dictatorship.

How we can fight the Poll Tax

What we must not do is wait. This would only tell the bosses that they can do whatever they like with us and cause us to fall into demoralisation. Our anger must be used to build on the already strong campaign of non-payment, no matter how often the Labour Party tells us to respect the bosses' law. This means that we must defend anyone who is faced with the bosses' attempts to steal their property to pay their bills.

Socialist Worker's advice would result in the most active workers throwing their efforts into improving the union bureaucracy's image (by implying that they could be won to the struggle), instead of galvanising other workers. The only way to overcome workers' lack of confidence is to go to them directly, and this is what we stand for.

Moreover, how is it supposed to increase workers' confidence by encouraging them to surrender control of their struggles to the union bureaucracy? It is necessary that workers control their own struggles, through mass meetings which debate the real issues facing them, and which exert direct democratic control over any delegates or strike committees elected by them on the basis of instant recall. These are the elements of proletarian democracy.

And after the Poll Tax ...

It is certainly possible for the Poll Tax to be defeated. But capitalism's driving force is not the maliciousness of the Tories or even of the bourgeois political parties as a whole (although they can certainly be malicious), but the thirst for profit, especially in the face of crisis. If they lose the Poll Tax, they will have no choice but to attempt other attacks on us. We, on the other hand, would have no choice but to fight back using the lesson we learn in this struggle.

Although temporary victories have immense value (they enable us to survive, for a start!), if the working class really wants to have a decent life, it must defeat capitalism as a whole, and run society in its own interest, the interest of the vast majority. This means the transformation of society through the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat, which will involve every worker in the running of the whole of society, and eventually lead to the abolition of classes, to communism.

COMMUNIST REVIEW

BACK ISSUES
are available from any of the IBRP
addresses. Price £1 for any single copy
and £5 for all seven

COMMUNIST REVIEW 1

- * Where we come from and where we are going
- * Platform and Statutes of the Bureau
- * On the Formation of the Communist Party of Iran
- * Crisis and Imperialism

COMMUNIST REVIEW 2

- * Perspectives
- * Theses on the British Miners Strike
- * Bordigism and the Italian Left
- * Theses of the Alptraum Communist Collective (Mexico)

COMMUNIST REVIEW 3

- * Communiqué on Mexican Earthquake
- * Draft Theses on the Tasks of Communists in Capitalism's Periphery
- * Correspondence with Indian Revolutionaries

COMMUNIST REVIEW 4

- * Imperialism in the Middle East
- * The International Bureau in India

COMMUNIST REVIEW 5

- * Gramsci - Myth and Reality
- * The Permanent Crisis
- * The Historic Course

COMMUNIST REVIEW 6

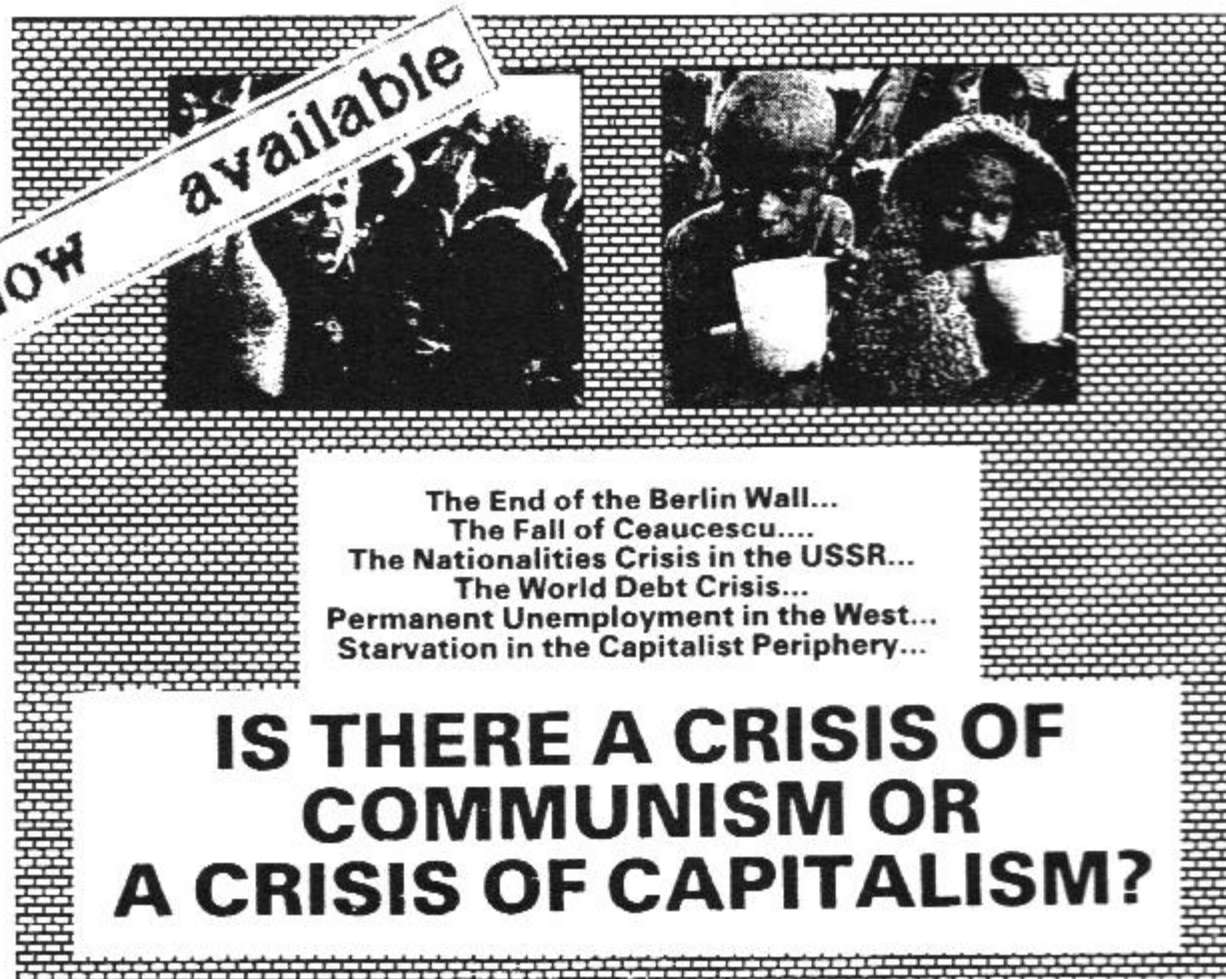
- * Gorbachev's Russia
- * The New Technologies of Capitalist Exploitation
- * Gramsci - The Concept of Hegemony
- * Obituary on Gramsci (from **Prometeo** 1937)

COMMUNIST REVIEW 7

- * The COBAS in Italy
- * Marxism and the Agrarian Question
- * Correspondence with Comunismo (Mexico)
- * Austerity Policies in Austria (from the GIK, Austria)

COMMUNIST REVIEW 8

Central Organ of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party



Also in this issue:

The Economic Crisis and the Working Class
Thatcherism and the British Experience

From Mystifications to Massacres: 40 Years
of the Chinese People's Republic

Bourgeois Barbarity in China: Another Face of
Capitalist Decadence

£1 \$3 Rs 5

Today East Germany, Tomorrow the World:

A Plebiscite for Anschluss in the GDR



The momentum of political change in Eastern Europe took a quantum leap forward, with the elections in the German Democratic Republic on March 18th. When the demonstrations against the discredited Stalinist regime began in the autumn, no one, least of all those like the "New Forum" group who organised them, raised the issue of German unification.

But, as we predicted at the time, the opening of the border with the West would make the G.D.R. economically unviable. The flood of refugees to better paid employment in the Federal Republic (or at least, the hope of it) would undermine the economy. Further a free market in currency would lead to massive speculative purchases by Westerners in the G.D.R., worsening the problem of scarcity.

The Federal Chancellor, Kohl, played his cards well. He refused to give the G.D.R. any economic aid until "market economics" were introduced; and he increased the pressure on the G.D.R. economy by continuing to lure workers from the East with promises of jobs, settling in money etc. Thus, in less than six months, the East German economy was near to collapse. Kohl then made his dramatic intervention in the G.D.R. election campaign, promising massive aid for "reconstruction" IF there was a vote for his satellite C.D.U. dominated "Alliance for Germany". At the same time he promised conversion of G.D.R. savings in Ost Marks, into West Marks at a one to one ratio. (This was equivalent to a per capita bribe of 8,000 Marks on average and it is not surprising that this promise is already in doubt.)

The likeliest beneficiaries of the collapse of the old S.E.D. (Communist) Party were the reformed Social Democrats (S.P.D.), who wanted a slow process of integration into Western imperialism, with some kind of federal relationship for the old G.D.R., and protection of its social security system. But as it was clear Kohl would not support the S.P.D.'s line, its support eroded, and in the end the right wing parties won almost half (48%) of the vote, and formed the government. What is surprising, in an election dominated by Geldpolitik (money politics) is that they did not win more. "We did not have five minutes to think about our lives, before they came with their Deutschmarks," as Ms Barbel Bohley of the "New Forum" complained. But leaving aside the laments of the advocates of a reformed state capitalism, what does the result mean?

EIN REICH, EIN VOLK, EIN KANZLER?

The election result merely confirms the evolution of certain material relations in Central Europe; the enormous superiority of the West German over the East German economy, and beyond that, the rebirth of an independent German imperialism.

The reunification of Germany will create a state in Mitteleuropa with 80 million people, ie. twice the population of Italy or France, and 50% greater than Britain's. Economically, the discrepancies are even greater. A united Germany will have twice Britain's G.N.P., and two and a half times its industrial production. It already is the world's leading exporter, with 20% of world manufactured trade; this can only increase now, with the old G.D.R. as the gateway to the markets of Eastern Europe. Already Volkswagen have

purchased the old Trabant works at Zwickau, and Opel the Wartburg plant in Eisenach, as much with an eye to the markets of Eastern Europe, as the G.D.R. The DM 15 bn. already invested in the G.D.R. is a flea bite compared to what will follow in the months ahead.

Not that the annexation of the G.D.R. will pose no problems for the Federal Republic. The sums so far spent, which include the DM 5 millions spent by Kohl's C.D.U. on the election campaign, and the DM 7 BILLION it has cost in aid to refugees from the East, are chickenfeed to what must come. As well as spending on the infrastructure of the G.D.R., estimated at DM 15 billion, Kohl's promise on the exchange rate of the Mark, will cost the Federal government DM 120 BILLION. It may well be, as the East German writer Stefan Heym put it, that "A snake has swallowed a hedgehog". But Kohl and the Federal bourgeoisie will think the price worth paying. By opening up a whole new area for the valorisation of the Mark, by the exploitation of a highly skilled and disciplined workforce, it will make Germany the economic giant of Europe, of overwhelming preponderance in the E.E.C. More, it will poise German imperialism to be best placed for the opportunities posed by the collapse of Russian control in Eastern Europe.

The ONLY thing that can prevent the re-emergence of German imperialism, is some sort of self denying ordinance by the German bourgeoisie, a refusal to be imperialist, as atonement for past sins. However willing they may be to take this ordinance at the moment, and however much sections of that bourgeoisie may share such an illusion, the combination of opportunities ahead, and difficulties posed by unification and the evolution of the capitalist economic crisis, will render meaningless any such grand gestures of self abnegation. For the third time this century, German imperialism is taking its initial steps towards Weltmacht.

THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

That the process towards German unity is unstoppable, has been realised by both the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R.

It is worth recalling that Stalin's policy after 1945 was for a united, but neutral, Germany, and that when Gorbachev calls for this today, he is merely echoing traditional Soviet policy. But as Gorbachev's problems, in concentric, ever decreasing circles, come nearer home, his ability to insist on any conditions to be attached to the unification process become lessened. Any Soviet military option over Germany is impossible, and she has no economic or political levers to pull.

The U.S.A. is in hardly a stronger position. After initial hesitation, Bush has now endorsed unification, and concentrated on keeping the new, united Germany in N.A.T.O., as a way of exercising U.S. influence, and slowing down, or preventing the re-emergence of a German "bloc" in Europe. Hence U.S. reluctance to reduce its military commitment in the Federal Republic, even given Russia's virtual military collapse in the East. Remember, as General Marshall said, the U.S. troops were there "To keep the Americans IN, the Russians OUT, and the Germans DOWN."

The so called "Two plus four" talks being

held on German unification are merely a face saver for the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., and an attempt to re-assure those, like the French and the Poles, who have worries about a reunified Germania. Doubtless out of them some face-saving formalities might come, and even a Peace Treaty (there was none in 1945). But students of history know what this is worth. East Germany to be a demilitarised zone to protect the U.S.S.R.? Like the Rheinland was to protect France...till 1936! A legal recognition of Poland's borders by the new Germany? Just as its borders were guaranteed by treaty...till 1939! In a new situation of tension, unleashed by the economic storms of world capitalism which lie ahead, all such treaties will, as in the past, be worthless. In the meantime, however, the new German imperialism will be willing to go to considerable lengths to reassure its neighbours and former masters. Kohl is not, as some stupid leftists have said, a new Hitler, but a new Stresemann. This is a new Locarno "honeymoon".

A NEW ORDER FOR WORLD IMPERIALISM.

The events in central Europe are further confirmation of the analysis the C.W.O. has been developing for the last year now. The domination of the world by the two imperialist power blocs centring on the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., is ending; the post-war settlement of Yalta and Potsdam is in full disintegration. A pre-war (though of long maturation) period is beginning; a new era in world history. What precise contours this period will take, it would be stupid to try and predict, but there are certain powerful indications in the making.

The defeated imperialisms of World War II, Japan and Germany have shrugged off the incubus of defeat, and have re-emerged in potentially a much more powerful position than before the last imperialist holocaust. For example, in 1939 Japan's G.N.P. was 15% of the U.S.A.'s; now it is 60%. Germany in 1939 was Britain's industrial equal; today it outproduces it two and a half times. With the break up of the Russian bloc, a powerful factor holding the Western Alliance together has gone. It is not fanciful to see the reemergence of a Japanese and/or a German imperialism in the future. Of the Yellow peril once again replacing the Red peril. The decline of the U.S.S.R. as an imperialism leaves it the option of seeking to become the junior partner in a new imperialist alliance; it has done this before, e.g. in World War Two, and can do it again. Beyond this it would be foolish to go. After the events of recent times, we have much analytical descriptive work to do on the restructuring of world imperialism, as well as theoretical work on the taproot of the changes we have seen, which honesty forces us to say were unexpected.

However, though we have problems, capitalism has more. The contours of the geopolitical map of world imperialism may have altered, but the problems of capital accumulation which are at the basis of the drive to imperialism remain. The world debt mountain, trade imbalances, inflation are all cancers growing away at the apparently Born Again capitalism, which will drive it towards new conflicts, of which we can already see the harbingers (economic friction between Japan, the U.S.A., and the E.E.C.).

The world is not the safer place now, of bourgeois propaganda. Indeed the existence of the G.D.R., and the partition of Germany, was the cornerstone of the post-war political arrangement that largely confined imperialist conflicts to the periphery of the globe. The collapse of Stalinism in East Europe, and the moves towards German unity, are signs that the contradictions of imperialism are moving inwards towards its heartlands. The option, as ever, before the working class is, imperialist war or proletarian revolution.

WORKERS OF ALL GERMANY, UNITE AGAINST THE REBORN GERMAN IMPERIALISM! DOWN WITH DEMOCRACY AND MYTHS OF VOLKSGEMEINSCHAFT! GERMANY IS TWO NATIONS: WORKERS AND CAPITALISTS!

WORKERS OF THE WORLD, IGNORE THE LIES ABOUT DISARMAMENT: WAR IS STILL CAPITALISM'S SOLUTION TO ITS CRISIS!

RCP Welcomes the Next Step

— Unification Against the German Working Class

The breaking up of the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe has come like pennies from heaven for the Western media. If we are to believe everything they are telling us: 'freedom' is finally on the march, tyranny is over and everywhere the people are rising up to demand the bountiful rights of 'democracy'. After 45 years of division, the 18th March election in East Germany was an expression of the German people's 'natural desire' to become one. Not only political parties of the right have joined in the song and dance about freedom, prosperity, 'revolution' and now, the inevitability of German reunification, but also those of the far left of capital; e.g. the self-styled Revolutionary Communist Party.

According to the RCP, a reunified Germany will be the best thing since the Third Reich: "The political conflict and outcome of the East German elections can only influence the timing, but not the inevitable movement towards reunification... 'Living Marxism' wholeheartedly supports the end of the division of Germany... It will help to overcome the artificial division of the German working class. And unity will contribute to the demise of the international balance that has benefited only capitalism in the West and Stalinism in the East. These are good arguments for supporting unity." (Living Marxism; March 1990; p31).

We have devoted considerable space in WV - (see e.g. WV 50) - to explaining how, despite its revolutionary pretensions, the programme and analyses of the RCP differ qualitatively from the marxism of the Communist Left. However few things better exemplify the reactionary political method of this group than their response to the historical turning point now underway in the Eastern bloc.

The price of unity

The German bourgeoisie can scarcely believe its luck: the monetary and industrial leadership of Europe handed it on a plate - and now the disintegration of Russian control of Eastern Europe and all that this entails in terms of the potential penetration of vast new captive markets. But what will a unified and more economically aggressive Germany mean for its working class?

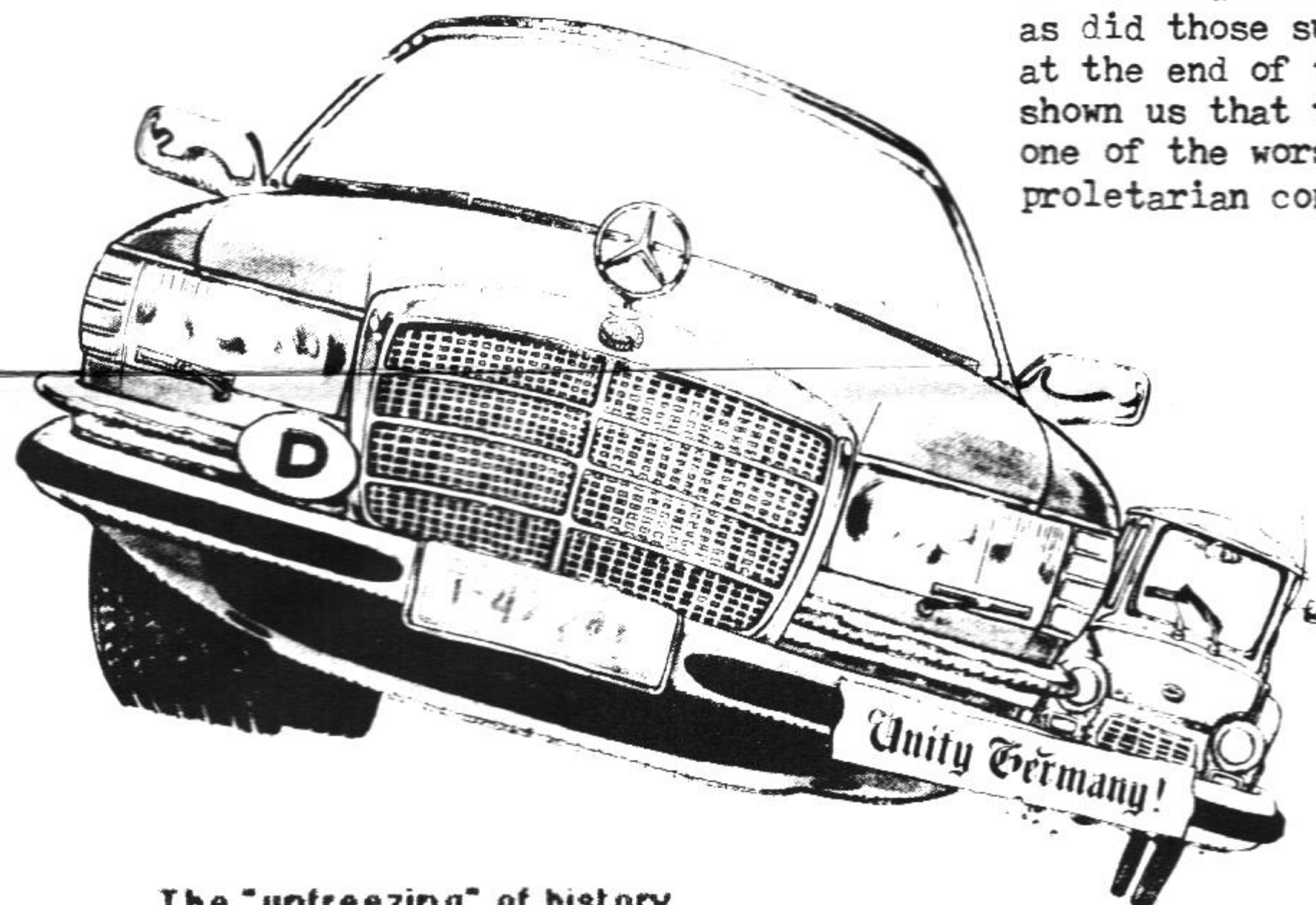
For the foreseeable future - the next 15 to 20 years or so - the GDR is bound to remain a capital burden on its superior partner. The updating of an antiquated E.German economy and the creation of a viable economic unit in terms of world market competitiveness - even if it were to proceed according to the most optimistic of Bundesbank pundits i.e. immune from the inevitable vicissitudes of the crisis - can only be a process which unleashes social upheavals in a region where social calm, if not torpor, has been the order of the day for the last three decades or so. The important issue for us - and one which the RCP seem entirely oblivious of - is that the working class will have to pay, and pay dearly, for the reintegration of East with West Germany. How can communists "wholeheartedly support" such a policy?

The GDR contains a vast source of cheap, highly educated and skilled labour that W. German capital is bound to attempt to transform into a kind of 'labour Bantustan'. The freedom of labour which it will 'enjoy' will be the 'freedom' to be more intensely exploited, or more curtly thrown on to the dole queue if it can't stand the pace. One set of exploiters (the legates of Honecker's state capitalism) will merely be exchanged for another set (the political confreres of Kohl's CDU). The slow grinding rhythm of toil will be displaced by a breakneck speed, with little if any compensation. With the abolition of state subsidies and protection of industry, price rises and unemployment will be the order of the day. The freedom to acquire goods of one's choice, rather than the bare minimum necessary for survival as wage slaves, can only come about with an enormous raising of the productivity of labour in the East i.e. through a ferocious

increase in the rate of exploitation. This, for the working class, is the real meaning of unification, which the RCP recommend us to "wholeheartedly support"!

Every structure of capitalism - social, economic and political - contains an 'artificial division' of the working class. Far from ending any 'artificial divisions', a new political unity of German capital can only mean the containment of the proletariat - international in its economic essence - within a new geographic boundary. In effect it will mean that the struggle of the class will face the combined resources of a bourgeoisie integrated into a more cohesive and massive state apparatus.

The whole history of capitalism since its decline into decadence after the First World War, demonstrates that the formation of any new nation state (e.g. Israel), far from promoting conditions favourable for the class struggle, is always and everywhere inimical to the historic interests of the proletariat. The working class itself, is the only agency which through its conscious struggle, can abolish all those artificial divisions imposed on it by the class enemy. This cannot be achieved through support of any faction of capital in its drive for the creation of a new alignment of forces on the international scene.



The "unfreezing" of history

".... the process that leads towards a united Germany has the potential to unfreeze history and to undermine the coherence and power of the entire capitalist world order." (LM p31).

Here again we find that the logic of the positions developed by the RCP is entirely within a capitalist frame of reference. Not only will the working class have nothing to fear from a nascent German imperialism, the latter will have the potential of destabilising "the entire capitalist world order"! What need of a working class, then? What need of it to carry out a social revolution?

And anyway, in an attitude typical of the petit-bourgeois Little Englander, - "Marxists living in Britain ought to be concerned with the power of Whitehall more than that of Bonn". (L.M. p31).

We concede that history may be 'unfreezing' under the weight of the disintegration of the Eastern bloc. But this unfreezing will take the form of a 'shuffling of the pack', of the formation of new imperialist alignments, of sub-blocs and client states. But there is nothing in this process which, of itself, necessarily creates conditions for the acceleration of a communist consciousness, which is what the RCP imply.

The collapse of an entire imperialist bloc will have enormous repercussions, but the fact that this historic event is taking place independently of the proletariat's self-activity does not induce in the class a sense of its own potential power, but may well have the opposite effect. After overthrowing first the Tsar then the bourgeoisie in Russia, it

was the class struggle which put an end to World War One, by bringing about the collapse of Imperial Germany. After that the first revolutionary wave developed on a world scale.

By contrast the fact that the class struggle was only of secondary importance in the collapse of the Axis countries after World War Two, played an important part in disorientating the proletariat in its immediate aftermath.

Today the Eastern bloc is collapsing under the weight of economic crisis rather than the blows of class struggle. If it had been the latter this would have strengthened the proletariat's self-confidence, and not weakened it as has been the case today.

To the extent that the collapse of the Eastern bloc comes after a period of 'cold war', which the West appears to have won, and with hardly a blow struck, at that, this creates the subjective conditions for the widespread broadcast of mystifications about the virtues of 'democracy', about the arrival of 'liberty', about the final defeat of 'communism' - (which in reality survived only a brief few years in Russia before its demise in worldwide counter-revolution). The prevalence of such an ideological atmosphere is not conducive to the growth of class consciousness. It cannot, of course surprise us that the populations of the Eastern European countries should feel a sense of 'liberation' from years of Stalinist terror, as did those subject to the horrors of the Nazis at the end of the 2nd World War. But history has shown us that this kind of popular emotion is one of the worst obstacles to the development of proletarian consciousness.

All the events rocking the Eastern bloc today are bound to weigh heavily and in a negative sense on the development of consciousness within the class. The opening of the Iron Curtain, which divided the world proletariat in two, will not, in the immediate 'unfreeze' history in a direction favourable to the working class. For some time to come it will be the strong democratic illusions of the workers in the East which will spill over into the West, weakening the class instinct and skepticism about the nature of bourgeois society, held by workers in the West. The ruling class, then, short of a radical downward spiral in the economic crisis, which remains the class's ineluctable 'ally', will be able to use the death agony of Stalinism in order to disseminate a wider ideological control over society. Groups like the RCP, in peddling their brand of specious marxism, are, in the last analysis, political-ideological servants of the bourgeoisie in extending this control. At the end of the day they will have to be politically 'frozen' by the working class.

IBRP Intervention

Due to an editorial error we omitted to say that the Address to East European workers in our last issue was a draft for a meeting of revolutionaries in Vienna. This draft was amended, accepted and translated into a number of European languages. It has already been distributed at workplaces in East Germany by the comrades of the GIK (Austria). Further details will be given in Communist Review 9.

Review

"The Politics of Illusion: Republicanism and Socialism in Modern Ireland"

Henry Patterson "THE POLITICS OF ILLUSION: REPUBLICANISM AND SOCIALISM IN MODERN IRELAND" (Hutchinson Radius, £7.95 in paperback, pp248)

Anyone familiar with Henry Patterson's past work will know this is a book he has been threatening to write for some time. He and a few of his academic collaborators have operated as a sort of "non-republican Marxist" gang over the last decade or so, producing numerous books and articles on Irish history and politics which have shared a common "alternative orthodoxy". Their freshness has been in the emphasis on the influence of particular historical circumstances, rather than the stale harking back to the national question, common elsewhere.

There has always been an implicit criticism of the dogmas of republicanism and its left-wing hanger's-on, though these have mainly concerned "historical" controversies such as the nature of the northern state in the past. "The Politics of Illusion" on the other hand, confronts the republicans head on over their claims to have taken socialism on board. The result is a fine book which, while failing to escape from some of the turgid jargon of academia, maintains a cutting edge with its strong political feel.

In fact the book is much more like a pamphlet than a research project and can in no way be considered an exhaustive study of Irish nationalism's flirtations with socialist ideas. Although it surveys republicanism's attempted uses of socialism since 1916, it concentrates on periods when they were responding to defeats of the "apolitical", purely militarist strategies of the IRA. The three main incidences of this were in the wake of the civil war, the Sixties after the border campaign and, the book argues, in the late Seventies when the British state

had reduced the Provos to a sporadic campaign. These were periods when all strands of republicanism faced the crisis of not being able to present a creditable solution to the problems facing the working class in general and the Catholic workers in particular.

In common with his previous work Patterson can't be accused of mere intellectual dallying, and he skips over the more famous legends of the republican movement (such as involvement in the Spanish Civil War) in favour of a fuller treatment of developments since the Sixties. Here his biggest contribution is a nicely judged assessment of the "socialism" within the Provos since the crisis of the PIRA ceasefire of 1975.

The shallowness of Sinn Fein's radical persona is exposed with several well chosen examples, which together form a plausible argument as to why the party seems to blow so hot and cold over its socialism. Patterson hints at a calculated gamble in the early Eighties to seek influence on the left of the British Labour Party in advance of their possible election. This was a period of maximum emphasis on working-class roots, socialist inspiration and even feminism. With Thatcherism consolidated and the revisionist right in the ascendancy in the Labour Party, Sinn Fein has been searching around for new allies in supporters of the SDLP and Fianna Fail, and we have seen corresponding calls for the muting of "abrasive class rhetoric".

The author rightly points out that there are always going to be limits to the radicalism of the "Social Republican". As an electoral force, Sinn Fein has consolidated a large and very stable base in West Belfast and Derry, but growth in rural areas and in the smaller towns would be jeopardised by adopting a more "extreme socialist" veneer. In fact the "socialism" of Sinn Fein is no more than a disjointed set of populist themes, designed to bring republicanism out of the military ghetto. In Britain its activity would be considered no more than routine constituency work - basically offering advice and making representations to the various institutions of the welfare state. The leading lights know that most of their appeal is based upon intransigent Hibernian nationalism, pure and simple;

"Adams recognises that the only realistic future for republicanism lies, not in a movement in a socialist direction, but in continuing to express and exploit the grievances of large sections of the CATHOLIC working class." (our emphasis)

Bits and pieces of socialist ideology are tacked on for window dressing when it suits, and when it helps to justify some of the more "illiberal" facets of Sinn Fein policy. For

example a bastardised version of Farrell's "labour aristocracy" notion looks quite sophisticated next to the old theories, but it still ends up making the Protestant and British working class fair game for the IRA. Danny Morrison summed up the "rigour" the leadership was looking for when he stated that the debate must not become a "Marxist Esperanto club"!

The book also gives a convincing explanation of the failure of the Provos in the Republic, the fact that it looks at developments in an all-Ireland context in turn being one of its major strengths. Basically Patterson suggests, correctly, that the working-class of the south will not respond when they feel they are being mobilised, not for their struggles but for a nationalist campaign in the north. The electoral and local marginalisation of the Dublin Provos is testimony to this.

But the contradiction is that it is only the existence of the "armed struggle" which makes the Provos in any way distinctive. Without it their vague social populism, mixed with a few socialist verbs, would be laughed off the housing estates as the garbage it is.

On the negative side Patterson rather lets the Provos off the hook over their espousal of the myth of national liberation, despite hints that their concept is rather unscientific and out of date. It should be stated quite categorically that the republican movement debases the Marxist notion of imperialism by claiming it is fighting to weaken the grip of British imperialism. Any Marxist analysis demonstrates that since 1945 both Britain and Eire have been under the domination of US capital in the western economic and military bloc. British forces are not in Ulster to secure some illusory economic interests, but to act as policeman for the bloc as a whole. To suggest that a united Ireland, however radical, could act independently of imperialist domination is as Utopian as it is crass.

Also a bit hard to take is Patterson's implied praise of the alternative strategy of the so-called Worker's Party - social democracy (with a hardy Stalinist edge) in the south and non-sectarian reformism in the north. The author has been involved with the Worker's Party in a small way and it shows. Although on the surface their policies seem more pleasant than bodies in alleyways, they create a whole new set of myths for the class to overcome. As any worker in the Republic can tell you, the sell-outs of the Worker's Party union officials and the dead-ends of their parliamentary activity can be every bit as frustrating, and have as little to do with socialism, as the northern Provo war.

C.W.O.

Helping the revolutionary work of the CWO...

Subscription to WORKERS' VOICE
(£2.50 in UK and Eire, £4.00 elsewhere) ☐

Subscription to WORKERS' VOICE and COMMUNIST
REVIEW
(£4.50 UK/Eire, £5.50 elsewhere) ☐

Supporter's Subscription (£10) ☐

(Cheques made out to "CWO Publications")

I wish to help the work of the CWO ☐

I want more information on the CWO ☐

Name.....

Address.....

Send to: BM Box CWO, LONDON, WC1N 3XX.

continued on page 3