

# WORKERS VOICE

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## Whatever Happened to the New World Order?

The President of the USA hailed the victory over Iraq as the beginning of "a new world order" little more than a year ago. As we look at the continuing agony of the Kurdish population in both Iraq and Turkey, as we watch the shelling in Sarajevo, as Afghanistan erupts into a new civil war between ethnic and Mujihadeen factions, as global agreement on pollution is stymied by individual imperialist interests of the metropolitan countries we can only ask what happened to Bush's boast?

As we, and others in the Communist Left argued at the time, there was never any new world order. It was supposed to be a world in which the benevolent help of Uncle Sam would ensure the dubious benefits of democracy to become established all over the planet. It was to be a world in which war was dealt with by the UN which would finally take on the role it was promised in 1945 as the world's peacemaker. A minor State department bureaucrat could write a best-selling book encapsulating this crap, called *The End of History*. Today even its author is retreating from his own arrogant analysis. History did not stop with the collapse of the "evil empire", as Reagan called the Soviet Union. It has continued to march on and the hopes for a trouble-free domination of the planet by the European-American-Japanese axis have vanished.

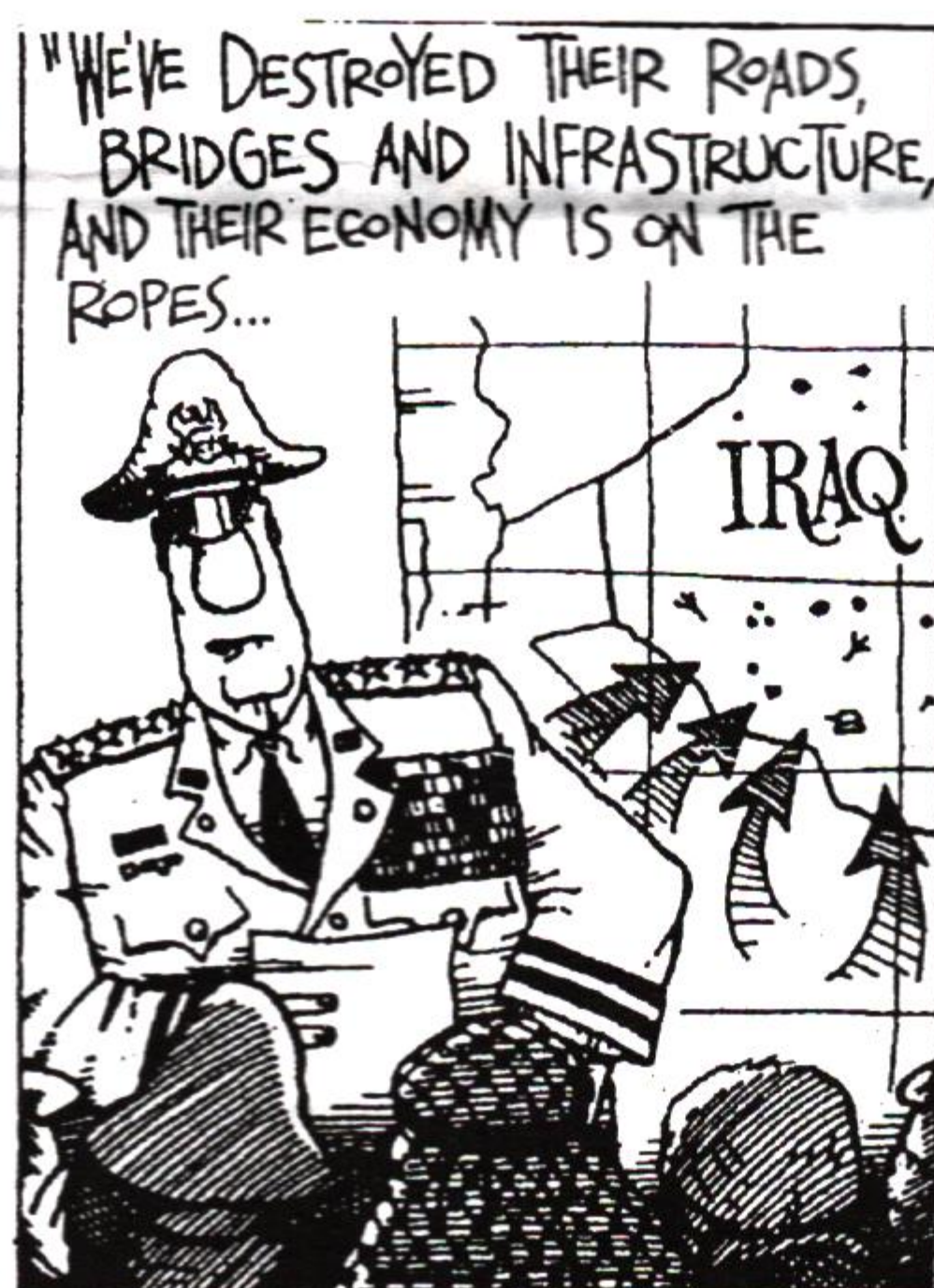
### The Social Crisis in the USA

Elsewhere in this issue we deal with the riots in Los Angeles. These are a symptom of the acute social crisis which effects all the metropolitan countries but especially the most powerful state in the world. This social crisis did not arise yesterday. It has been with the USA for decades. When Lyndon Johnson set up his "Great Society" programme in 1965 the aim was for the Democratic Party to increase welfare spending to win black votes. But in fact after the first 4 years welfare aid started to fall. When Reagan took office it had already fallen by 29% in 12 years. Reagan cut it further, from 28% of the Federal Budget to 23% in 6 years. Today in the aftermath of the Los Angeles riot there are further welfare cuts planned. Under the title "welfare reform" the Governor of California, Pete Wilson is asking for voters to approve a cut of 10% in welfare

benefits (to be followed by a further 15% to any family containing an able-bodied adult). There was a time when the word "reform" meant "make better"! The reform has been very cleverly politically managed.

*By presenting welfare cuts as an alternative to reductions in state spending on education, Mr Wilson has effectively pitted the interests of middle class Californians against those of the underprivileged and, to a large degree, whites against minorities.*

*Financial Times 13.5.92*



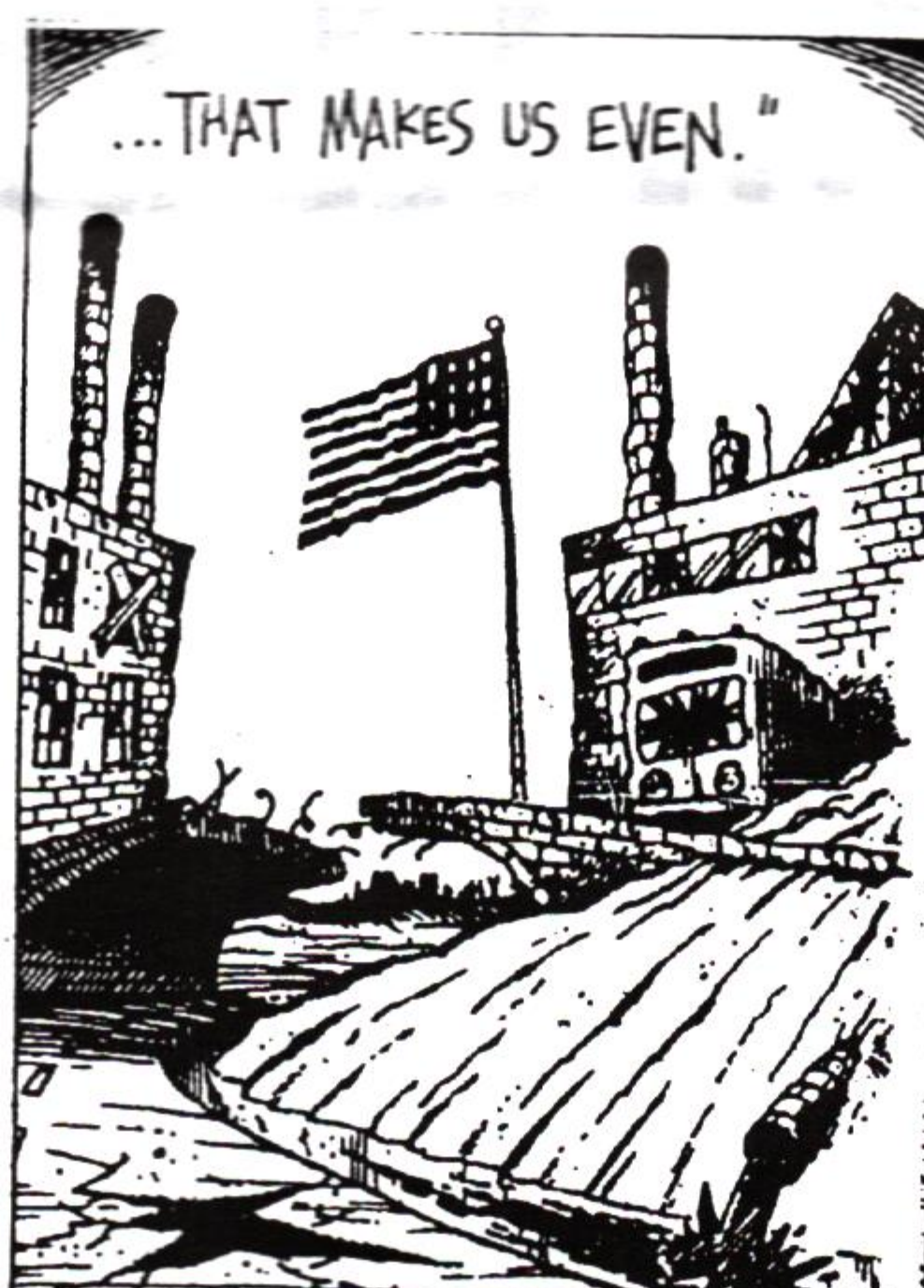
This new barbarism is thus presented as a choice. It is a form of class war since those on welfare (2.3 millions in California alone) tend not to be registered to vote whilst the "comfortably off" do. There is no question that in wealth terms alone class divisions in the USA are widening. In the 1970s company executives earned 34 times the wage of a average worker. In February 1992 that had become 160 times.

We are not recounting this to underline the obvious i.e. the continuing inequity of modern capitalism. Whilst we have to participate in any fight against the attacks of the capitalist state we do not do this with the illusion that this is going to lead to anything other than temporary gains. Capitalism cannot be reformed out of existence and it cannot be permanently reformed to guarantee a decent existence even for the workers in the world's richest countries. Neither do we maintain the simplistic idea that the continuing worsening of living conditions will automatically lead of itself to a revolution. It won't. What it does show is a social system in decay. We want to underline that these massive attacks on the

working class (the attacks on welfare spending also helps in wage cutting and increased exploitation in the workplace) are forced on the capitalists by a crisis of its economic system which refuses to go away.

### The Economic Crisis in the USA

The present crisis is not just this recession. That is only part of a much longer and historical crisis of accumulation. We refer to it as the third cycle of accumulation (the first two ended in the two world wars which engulfed the planet). After the Second World War US capitalism promised an American dream of



ever greater prosperity for all. This was in fact a bit of a myth since millions of workers were never part of that dream. However the boom on which the myth prospered came to an end in 1972 when Nixon was forced to devalue the dollar. It was the first time the US went back on the promises it made (in 1944) to keep the dollar as good as gold. Why did Nixon do it? The answer is because of the massive collapse in the profits of US firms. The third cycle of accumulation had come to an end. According to Ferguson and Rogers

*profits of US firms declined after 1965 and failed through the next 15 years to regain their early 1960s levels. Annual net investment in plant and equipment followed suit, falling from an average 4% of GNP during 1966-70 to 3.1% over 1971-75 and 2.9% over 1976-80.*

As a result of falling US profitability the US trade balance fell into negative for the first time this century. By devaluing the dollar Nixon not only hoped to raise US exports but also devalued the US external debt. In short the US got its allies to pay for its crisis. Since

then the growth of the world economy has been almost stationary. As a result governments have had falling revenues and rising costs (especially in social security payments to an unexpected army of unemployed). This is the background to privatisation, de-regulation and spending cuts all over the world as governments attempt to free capital to get out of the crisis. By the late 1980s Keynesian policies were discredited as capitalist attempts to spend their way out of the crisis led only to hyperinflation. For the first time in its history capitalism was faced with both high inflation and high unemployment. The hour of the monetarists had struck. But they too failed to dent state spending especially in the USA where Reagan's massive arms build up not only bankrupted the USSR (which had tried to compete) but is still today a millstone around the neck of the world's greatest military power. And this brings us to the root of the present dangers. The USA is the dominant military power but it no longer has the economic means to sustain that dominance.

### Apocalypse Now?

In the context of twenty years of stagnation the present collapse of the USSR has actually offered capitalism a breathing space. There is no longer a threatening military situation to accompany a threatening economic crisis. But it will not remain so. Already the signs are that, despite the formal attempts to hold the US global system together, many of the old institutions set up after 1945 are under severe strain.

Take the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) for example. This has always been a deal between the dominant economic countries of the capitalist metropolises (USA, EEC and Japan) to fleece the primary producers of every commodity. It operates on the principle that tariffs are a restriction on trade (and were prime causes of the two world wars). Tariffs, which any country wanting a cheap method to protect new industry etc used in the past, were now banned. But subsidies are, or rather were, not. Only the rich countries can afford subsidies. These are in effect the new tariffs. GATT therefore helps enshrine the unequal exchange which has maintained and even increased the difference in the per capita incomes of the metropolises and peripheral countries.

However in the face of global stagnation (last year was the first time in capitalist history when production on the planet actually fell) what has happened in the latest round of talks (the so-called Uruguay Round). Nothing. The failure to reach agreement reflects the

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# Capitalism? It's a Riot

*Capitalism is falling apart at the seams. It is not just inner cities that are decaying but the whole rotten system. Communists have been saying this repeatedly for years and for years capitalist politicians have been telling us that "the upturn is in sight"... But the only cause of the riots is the capitalist crisis.*

*Unemployment and inflation are here to stay until either the working class puts capitalism out of the misery it inflicts on us or until the capitalists themselves try to 'solve' their national problems by blowing the world to pieces.*

No, the above was not written in response to the recent riots in Los Angeles and elsewhere. We actually wrote it in 1981 in *Workers Voice* 5 in response to the riots in 30 European cities that year. Little has changed since then except that in the last decade the working class has been on the retreat all over the world. The burden of twenty years of the capitalist crisis has been paid for in unemployment, homelessness and destitution for millions. Others have found it hard to resist speed-ups and increased exploitation for fear of being

thrown on to the scrapheap. The very idea of organised united working class resistance has been almost wiped out (with a few honourable exceptions). In this climate of hopelessness it is not surprising that there has been an increasing incidence of riots in nearly every country on the planet. Recently, apart from the famous event in LA there have been less publicised riots in the Lebanon, Nigeria and Malawi. The significant fact is that these are not just isolated occurrences but are linked to other forms of working class resistance.

## Lebanon

In May the Lebanese pound fell to 2,100 to the dollar (it was 2.5 to the dollar in 1975). Prices of basics have doubled or trebled since February. Workers were prominent in the group which burned down the Finance minister's house in Beirut. In Tyre and Sidon protesters shouted "Down with a government that starves its people" and barricades were put up to stop government troops ending the protest. As we could have predicted the Confederation of Trades Unions tried to halt the protests. It called for a three day general strike when workers demanded an unlimited

general strike. The exhaustion of the 15 year civil war that ended in 1990 helps to explain why the unions were successful in their manoeuvre to support the government. But it is that exhaustion rather than satisfaction of demands which accounts for the uneasy calm in the country at present.

## Malawi

At least 40 people were killed and scores injured in Blantyre, Limbe and Lilongwe in clashes with the police. Although some of the clashes are in demonstrations in support of the democracy movement led by Chakufwa Chihana the most important one in Blantyre on May 5th was started by striking workers from the textile factory owned by the Lonrho multinational. They were demanding better wages. The demonstration was joined by thousands of others and looting of supermarkets owned by the Malawian dictator, Banda, became a major activity. The significance of this is that workers in Malawi are beginning to move on their own terrain for their own demands. The expected IMF aid to the country will undoubtedly lead to more attacks on their living standards. The Malawi

ruling class, however, have the option of ditching Banda (who is over 80) and bringing in democracy. A new régime will buy time but it too will attack the working class since it will almost certainly be a tool of the IMF.

## Nigeria

Since February there has been a wave of riots here. Many seem to have taken the form of attacks by one ethnic group on another. However the picture is complicated. There have also been student demos which became riots through the participation of the urban unemployed, and on May 15th the *Guardian* reported that tear gas was fired at thousands of workers and students demonstrating against "poverty and fuel shortages".

The root cause of the struggles are the economic attacks of the military government. In February the naira, the Nigerian currency was devalued by 42%. This raised the cost of living by 400% in a country where the minimum daily wage is about 30 pence. Once again this is a result of an International Monetary Fund demand that prices go up before 'aid' is made available. It is not often that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Norman Lamont gets it right but what is happening in Africa today only underlines what he told Radio 4 News on May 27th that "Help from the IMF is not a free lunch". It will be great consolation to those who are starving to know that their deaths will contribute to the saving of world capitalism for a while longer. Predictably the unions are once again acting to maintain the system. Paschal Bafyau, the leader of the National Labour Congress has condemned the riots because they might interrupt "the political transition process" (*Guardian* 19.5.92). Lets hope so!

## Democracy to the Rescue

The difference between Los Angeles and the African states is that the latter hold the illusion that democracy will solve their problems. In Los Angeles they know that democracy is part of the problem. Only 20% of those eligible vote (less than 50% of those eligible register, 40% of these actually vote), with good reason, as the choice is simply which ruling class representative misrules you. The con trick of "free elections" dominated by the capitalist press and the great capitalist monopolies' chosen candidates is a superb fig-leaf for the totalitarianism of democracy. The problem for the capitalists is that every so often frustration against their totalitarianism erupts into uncontrollable anger.

## Riots and Revolutionary Consciousness

Such was the case with the riots that occurred in all the countries mentioned above. The

*continued on page 5*

# New World Order?

*continued from front page*

fact that the OECD countries that dominate GATT are demanding of each other that they drop subsidies on this or that commodity. The hypocrisy of the US in this situation in revealing the hidden protectionism in Japan and Europe (whilst excusing its own) has stunned its erstwhile friends. But they have eventually begun to fight back and ignored the deadlines the USA tried to impose on the round. The result is stalemate. But it indicates a new desperation on the part of a USA which is the world's biggest debtor nation. Compare the present situation to that after World War Two. To fend off Communist (i.e. Stalinist) victories in elections in France and Italy the US produced the Marshall Plan which poured billions into Western Europe. Today, faced with a Russia in crisis, threatening to collapse into uncontrollable chaos from capital starvation, the premier capitalist power on the planet can only offer a miserly sum of \$100 million. This economic weakness helps to explain the increasingly desperate and isolated tone of Bush's pronouncements. It is also accompanied by an increasingly aggressive tone from other organs of the US state.

## The Pentagon Files

It is no accident that the Pentagon "leaked" a dossier of 46 documents about future US foreign policy earlier this year. The contents underline the aggressiveness of a military power facing economic decline. The files contained four policy aims.

1. The elimination from the face of the earth any regime which still claimed to be inspired by communist ideology (we wish there was one!), by which they meant Cuba and North Korea.
2. Continuation of US nuclear policy towards

the ex-USSR just in case Russia takes up the nuclear mantle of the former Soviet Union. Therefore there is to be no dismantling of US nuclear capacities.

3. Prevention of the new economic powers of Germany and Japan becoming military forces in their own right so that they could never challenge US hegemony.
4. Both NATO and the UN to continue as US-dominated structures to police the world.

This represents the megalomania of a dangerous imperialist power. In some ways it is a continuation of the policy which already operated in the last days of the Cold War. The bombing of Tripoli, the invasion of Grenada and Panama, the support for the contras in Nicaragua, and the Gulf War represent a new stridency in US imperialist policy. However the latest Pentagon leaks are a result of the serious economic (and social) crisis which has overtaken the USA and the fact that there is no external enemy like the USSR to discipline the former Western bloc members.

There are other signs of the increasing economic pressure on the US in the current Presidential election campaign. A third of President Bush's own party have demonstrated support for Pat Buchanan, a candidate whose slogan "America First" is taken from that of Warren Harding in 1920 (when the USA went 'isolationist'). Increasingly protectionist policies are being seen as feasible (particularly against Japanese products), despite the fact that the US ruling class is well aware of the ruin that the protectionism of the 1920s brought. The final demonstration that the USA is in no fit state to create a 'new world' came at the Rio Earth summit when Bush neutered the treaty on controlling emissions

which led to global warming and refused to sign the biodiversity treaty because the US drugs industry wasn't going to give up the monopoly on the products of the rain forests.

It is not part of Marxist scientific method to predict the precise outline of what will happen next but we can point out that the historical options are limited. The world capitalist system is still in a historic crisis of accumulation. This cannot be resolved without a major devaluation of capital on a global scale. So far this century war has been the only means of carrying out such a widespread devaluation. War is, however, not yet on the agenda because the necessary political conditions have not yet been created. But they are in process of being created as different states manoeuvre to pursue their own, increasingly narrow, interests. Inevitably this will lead to new alliances and new antagonisms. When they are fully in place the present chaos will seem infinitely preferable to the increased barbarism which capitalism has in store for us

## References

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*California riots focus minds on welfare reform, Financial Times* (13.5.92)  
*Business Week* (3.2.92)  
*The USA's New World Order Means More Bankruptcy and Crisis Workers Voice* 59 (Winter 91-92)  
*The End of the Cold War: A Step Towards a New Imperialist Line-Up Communist Review* 10

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## South Africa after the Referendum

# BLACK BOSSES CLOSER TO POWER

## NO CHANGE FOR THE WORKERS

The massive vote for reform in the March referendum should not have surprised anyone. The real issue to be decided was whether the black African bourgeoisie should be given a share of political power. South African capitalism together with Western imperialism required a decisive "Yes" vote, and when capitalism has decisive needs it finds means of securing the right votes from the working class. The South African bosses all contributed massive funds to the "Yes" campaign as the only answer which might revive South African capitalism. The "No" camp was portrayed as an absurd anachronism in the media. Capitalism needs to bring the black bosses into the circle of the ruling elite because it

knows that without them the explosive social situation could not be brought under control. Without them South African industry cannot be restructured and without these things foreign capital could not be secured for the investment that is so desperately needed. For South African capital the Mandelas, Tambos and Mbekes have a vital role to play and the sooner they are brought to the centre of the stage the better.

In winning this referendum De Klerk has jumped several hurdles at one leap. The most important of these is that the referendum can be presented as the mandate for a binding constitutional deal with the African nationalists. This means that there is no need for a future whites-only referendum on the new constitution. Secondly, he has marginalised his right wing opponents, and thirdly he has now achieved a free hand to end the policy of internal destabilisation carried out by the police and military. This allows closer cooperation with the ANC and the dumping of Inkatha. Moves along these lines have been evident since the referendum and even tentative moves to purge the police and military have been started. For example, a white commander who ordered the massacre of ANC mourners at a funeral as part of the policy of support for Inkatha has been sentenced to death. More details of the operation of military training camps for Inkatha killers run by the army and the notorious death squads are slowly coming to light. These are, of course, implicating senior government and army figures, but clearly De Klerk feels that these people can be sacrificed. Meanwhile 5 white MPs have joined the ANC giving it a voice in the white parliament.

As the move to bring the African nationalists to power proceeds they too are marginalising their radical elements. This is the real meaning of Mandela's break with his wife Winnie, who still has a following amongst the more radical rank and file ANC members. It is also the reason behind Mandela's downgrading of the ANC's commitment to nationalisation of the key sectors of the South African economy.

### Condition of the Working Class

The condition of the black African working class is appalling and is constantly deteriorating. *Le Monde Diplomatique* reports that overall 47% of the active population is unemployed, and that income per head has fallen 1.5% each year since 1981. Coupled with inflation of around 20%, no social security and the massive disruption of families and social patterns created by apartheid the social situation is explosive. More vulnerable sections of the population are on the brink of starvation, particularly the elderly and children are often simply abandoned by destitute mothers. Levels of crime have long exceeded those of the worst US cities and the police have given up trying to enforce the law in many areas. These things are a consequence of both the global crisis of capitalism and the particular idiocies of apartheid.

The global aspect of the crisis is reflected in the general decline in the whole of the southern

African region. Countries which have appeared stable for years, such as Malawi and Zaire have been torn apart by strikes, riots and mutinies. In Malawi the first strikes for thirty years have just taken place (see p. 2 of this issue). These two countries also suffer from the fact that they are no longer of strategic importance to Western imperialism since the ex-USSR's African ambitions in Angola and Mozambique have long since collapsed. Now loans and sources of economic support are drying up and the West has just realised that these countries are not democracies! Within Mozambique and Angola the situation has been made worse by the guerilla wars for which the West and particularly South Africa are directly responsible. Throughout the region there is also a severe drought and the combination of these factors is resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths in Mozambique and floods of refugees to the surrounding countries including South Africa. The misery inflicted upon them by South Africa does not end there. Many Mozambican women are sold as concubines for less than £40 to the black bourgeoisie whilst the white farmers take those that can work as slaves. If they complain of the lack of wages they are immediately handed over to the police for deportation back to Mozambique.

### Democracy to the Rescue

The bosses aim to save the day by introducing bourgeois democracy and getting the black bosses up front to defuse the situation whilst little in fact will socially change. Already the press is full of talk about the need to dampen down the expectations Africans hold out for the future. In plain language that means that nothing will change with the introduction of democracy. All that will change is that the workers will have voted for their oppressors, who will be in a position to then impose restructuring, which for the working class means increased productivity, redundancies and further hardship, with a "mandate" from the people. The workers' position will in fact be worse.

Unfortunately the working class in South Africa and elsewhere, e.g. Malawi, appears to be taken in, at least for the present, by the democratic charade. Democracy has given nothing to the European and American working classes but it will give the bosses time and political space. South African workers should not be deflected from their own programme as apartheid's collapse dominates the agenda. Workers should continue to fight on the economic front for better wages and conditions and against redundancies. Here they will immediately come into conflict with the ANC-dominated unions. These will call more and more openly for workers to give the ANC a chance, be patient and even make sacrifices for the "good of the country". All this shit has been heard before. South African workers will have to break with the millionaire businessmen who fund the nationalists and with their henchmen in the trades unions. With the collapse of apartheid the real class struggle can begin.

### Other Workers' Voice Articles on South Africa

To receive the following articles as a collection, send £3 to the Group address (on page 2).

*South Africa - Who Will exploit the Workers?* (WV58)  
*Apartheid to Go; Capitalism to Stay* (WV56)  
*More Carnage for Capitalism* (WV54)  
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### Public Meeting

## Nationalism and Capitalist World Disorder

A joint public discussion by the Communist Workers Organisation, the Communist Bulletin Group, and Internationalist Perspectives.

Gulliver's Bar, Oldham St.  
 Manchester  
 2.30 p.m.  
 Saturday, June 27th 1992

The failures of Stalinism and Trotskyism and the continuing misery of Western capitalism demand a response from the international proletariat. The groups of the internationalist communist left have defended the communist (as opposed to state capitalist) programme of the working class for more than half a century. Today this programme is more relevant than ever but it has to be fought for within the working class against all the capitalist claptrap about the collapse of communism. The meeting is a contribution to that fight. All welcome.



# BREST-LITOVSK AND PEACE

*Men make history but not in circumstances of their own choosing (Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon)*

**The collapse of so-called "communism" in the former USSR and its satellites confirms what the Communist Left have been arguing since the 1920s that Russia was not, and indeed, never became, "communist". And yet the October Revolution was without doubt the greatest working class victory in history. The task we have before us is to explain how a workers' revolution eventually became a new form of capitalist exploitation. This is not the same as the sterile historical exercise of finding a date for "Thermidor", the end of the revolution, as the Trotskyists try to do. The point is look at the total experience of that period and to draw both the positive and negative lessons for the**

The first great test of the Russian workers government was over the question of peace with Germany. The Bolsheviks had always been at the head of opposition to the war (See our pamphlet 1917 Chapter One, available from the group address for £1). Indeed it owed its dramatic rise in popularity within the working class to precisely this factor. The Tsar and Kerensky, the Mensheviks and the SRs had all been brushed aside because they all wished to continue the imperialist war. The question however was what kind of peace would the Bolsheviks obtain from the Germans and under what circumstances would the peace come about.

By signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March, 1918, the Bolsheviks, and particularly Lenin, were denounced by the right for selling out the Russian nation whilst the Left Communists even split from the Party for a time and called the peace a betrayal of the world working class. As the Brest-Litovsk issue raises many questions of revolutionary tactics it is just as alive today as it was seventy years ago. It is worth careful re-examination.

## FROM REVOLUTIONARY DEFEATISM TO THE CAPITALIST WHIRLPOOL

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

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

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

COLLECTED WORKS (1928) Vol 21, p.259

This promise was fulfilled in the first international act of the "provisional workers and peasants government" on Nov 8, 1917. The *Decree on Peace* which Lenin had spent the first night of workers' power drafting was really an appeal to governments and peoples to end the war. It was deliberately not couched in revolutionary terms. There was nothing in it about imperialism as the cause of war or that

only a proletarian seizure of power could prevent more wars in the future. The aim was to give the capitalists no excuses for continuing the war, thus exposing them in front of their own people.

In this sense it was successful since the US President Wilson was forced to issue his famous 14 Points for "a just and democratic peace" only two months later. But whilst the capitalist windbag in the White House was mouthing sentiments about "open c'enants, openly arrived at" the Bolsheviks were publishing the secret treaties that the Russian bourgeoisie had signed with their friends in Britain and France to carve up the world. Henceforth Trotsky told the Soviet Executive

***There exists for us only one unwritten but sacred treaty of the international***



The signing of the armistice at Brest-Litovsk, December 1917. The Germans are seated on the left, the Russians on the right. Kamenev and Joffe in civilian clothes at the table.

## ***solidarity of the proletariat.***

In fact this had been the main plank in the argument for the Bolsheviks to take the lead in overthrowing the Provisional Government in October. Lenin had argued that "the international situation gives us a series of objective grounds for believing that if we come out now, we shall have all proletarian Europe on our side". The "objective grounds" Lenin referred to was the mutiny which had occurred in the German Fleet. He would have been even more optimistic had he heard the news of the mutinies in the French and British armies. However the Allied High Command managed to suppress this at the time.

What the Bolsheviks hoped to do by entering into negotiations with the Germans at their Army Headquarters at Brest-Litovsk was to buy time. With no army to resist further German advances they could only rely on the fact that the Germans were preparing to hold the Eastern Front whilst the "knock out blow" would be delivered in France. In this respect the October Revolution did not change German policy. Indeed the German desire to achieve a peace in the East which would need less troops to police it was one of the reasons why first Joffe, then Trotsky were able to spin out the negotiations for over 4 months.

If the Bolsheviks were united behind the idea of trying to keep negotiations going to await

**communist programme of the future. It was only in the face of real events that the ideas that the socialist movement had carried for years could be tested and evaluated. Theories about whether a revolution could succeed in one country by itself taken singly were only theories until 1917. Questions about the precise relationship between a working class party and the class as a whole only became significant in that period of revolutionary turmoil. The important point is that we should not be paralysed by the past defeats of the working class - we must positively learn from them. This is the task of the present series.**

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

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

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

Trotsky, on the other hand, actively thought that he could play off the imperialist powers.

Thus

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

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

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

## ***"PEREDYSHKA"***

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

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

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

But

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

(Quoted in Carr op. cit p.45)

To Lenin making peace at all costs would be the best advert for world revolution since the war-weary workers would have no better contrast than the rapaciousness of imperialism

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

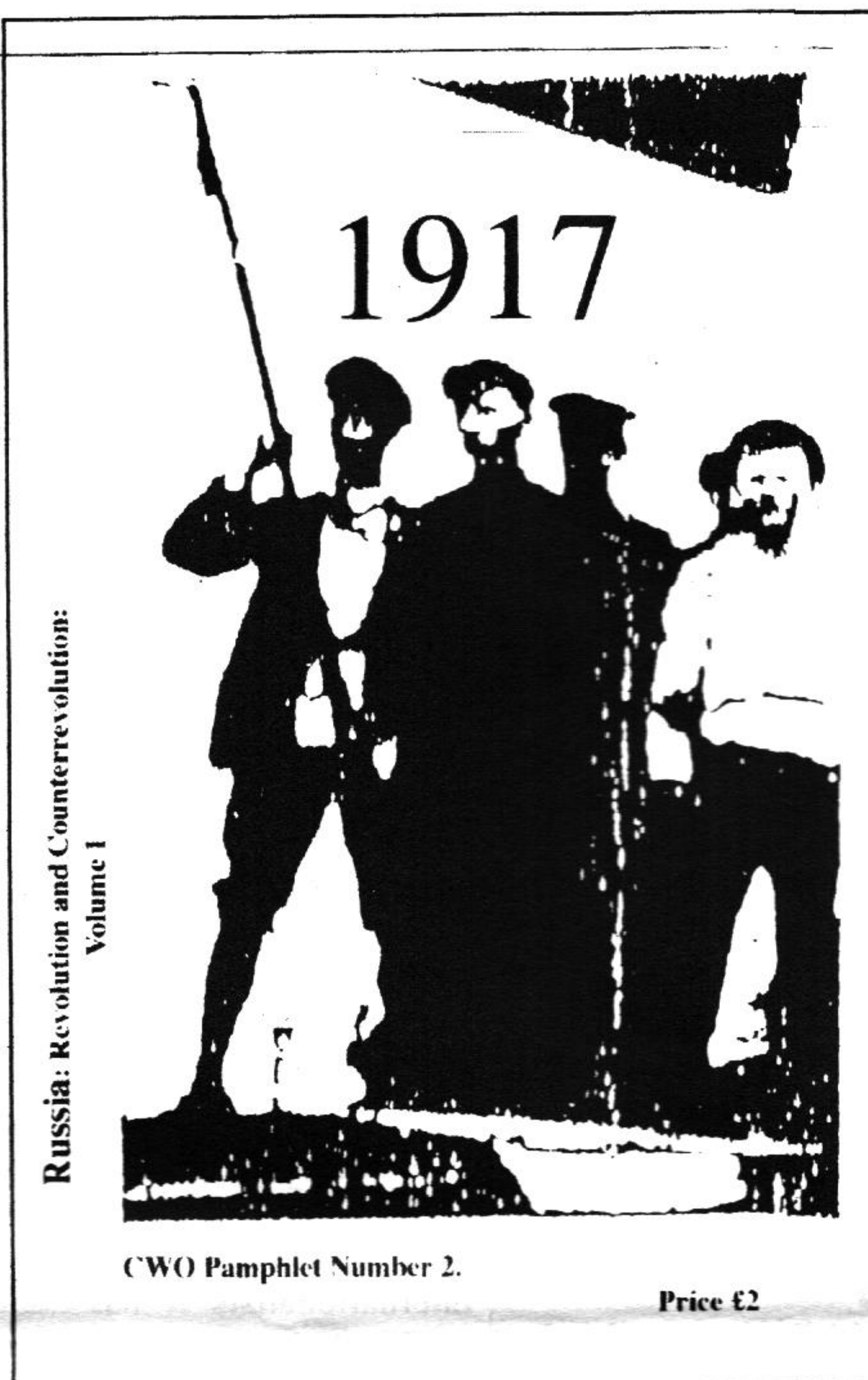
the Left Communists were renewing their call for a revolutionary war. The first issue of their journal *Kommunist* contained an article by Bukharin and Radek which stated that "No conscious revolutionary would agree to such dishonour" as the treaty and that

*we should die in a fine pose, sword in hand, crying 'Peace is dishonour, war is honour!'*

This kind of language sounds more like that of Don Quixote than serious revolutionaries but there was a genuine concern behind this call. The Left Communists were seriously worried that the Bolsheviks were abandoning the internationalist principles which had marked them out from every other socialist party in Europe. In the light of the further degeneration of the revolution into Stalin's "socialism in

one country" it has to be seriously asked if Brest-Litovsk was the first step on the road to the abandonment of the world revolution in favour of defending Russian state capitalism.

As Lenin was himself proposing "state capitalism" as the economic programme of the revolution pending the extension of workers' power to other areas, it would seem that there is a degree of coherence in this. However, Lenin's aphorism "facts are stubborn things" marked out his method in this debate rather than any change of principles.



To him signing Brest-Litovsk was a TACTIC. The stubborn fact was that the Bolsheviks had no alternative unless they wanted German bayonets to wipe out "Red Petrograd". In addition he still expected that a German Revolution in a few months would wipe out all treaties (and in November 1918 he was to be proved right). His speech at the Seventh Party Congress on March 6th was probably the most hard-hitting of his career. He severely castigated the "fools" who talked of "dishonour" and argued that

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

(Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett p.280)

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

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

*I don't mean to read it and I don't mean to fulfil it, except in so far as I am forced.*

(Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett p.276)

In response the *Kommunist* group argued that

*the conclusion of the peace has a negative effect on the spiritual and psychological*

*development of the international revolution.*

(in *Theses of the Left Communists*, published by Critique, Glasgow 1977).

They pointed to the fact that the German and Austrian ruling classes would now have the grain lands of the Ukraine to offer bread to their workers to support imperialism. Further the work of fraternisation and propaganda with the armies of the Central Powers would have to be abandoned.

These "facts" however turned out to be wrong. In the first place the German General Staff needed 1 million men in the Ukraine to enforce their robber peace. Hoffman, the German commander in the East was soon complaining to his superiors that these troops were unreliable since they had become infected with the "Bolshevist virus". And the Ukrainian peasants failed to cough up the grain which the Germans and Austrians had hoped to entrain for Berlin and Vienna. As a result Brest-Litovsk did not prevent that increase in starvation of the German and Austrian masses. This was the factor which led to the revolutions of October and November 1918 which brought about an end to the war. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was therefore only in force for about six months. This hardly bears out the fears of Bukharin and others that the peace had held up the world revolution.

As for the ending of revolutionary propaganda it was one of the terms of the Treaty that there should be an exchange of ambassadors. Joffe was sent to Berlin where he was extremely successful in directing literature about the situation in Russia and the hope for world revolution to the most advanced sectors of the German working class. It cannot therefore be said that Brest-Litovsk held back the promotion of world revolution. On the contrary it was the failure of the working class and Germany and Western Europe to defeat the more entrenched bourgeoisies of the West that left the world revolution isolated in its Russian outpost.

This is however another chapter. What Brest-Litovsk did not do was bring about peace. Not only did it turn the imperialist war into a civil war when the Left SRs split from the workers' government and began a campaign of assassinations against the leading Bolsheviks, but it also altered the imperialist enemies of the Russian proletariat. A new phase in the Russian Revolution opened up after March 1918. The White armies led by counter-revolutionary generals were soon assisted by a host of armies sent against the Russian working class. Isolated and faced by 14 Allied armies from Britain, France, the United States and Japan as well as a host of lesser powers the Russian workers state was soon faced with some unpalatable choices which in the end undermined its proletarian character. It is to this that we will turn in our next issue.

# Riots

*continued from page 2*

capitalists have various lines of argument to deny that the riots are genuine expressions of working class anger. The first line is to try to divide or marginalise the rioters from the rest of the working class. Often they talk of "race riots" when the factor of race is really only one of many issues (and only a minor issue at that though the capitalist state, particularly in the US, carefully stimulates it to divide the working class). Or they will describe the rioters as "the underclass" as though they had emerged from sewers. In fact this is not an underclass but the most marginalised layer of the working class. They are the great army of unemployed whose existence helps to discipline the rest of us into accepting worse exploitation. They are part of the capitalist system or rather part of its opposition. The final capitalist trick is to simply criminalise the rioters. This can easily be dismissed as nonsense. The first targets of the Los Angeles riots were basic necessities like food and baby clothes. Only as the riots developed did the targets change to electrical consumer goods (even then many were destroyed rather than stolen). Every mass movement is also a convenient cover for the criminals who crawl out of the woodwork to use its cover for their own purposes. But even these are infinitely less criminal than those who created the conditions for the riot in the first place.

Revolutionaries neither condemn nor praise riots in the abstract. It is a question of context. It should not be forgotten that the February Revolution of 1917 in Russia began with a women's demonstration which became a bread riot. However, it must also be remembered that this riot took place as part of a wider movement involving mass strikes in the main factories of Petrograd. And this is the point. A riot on its own is easily recuperable by capitalism. In some riots the lack of consciousness and a clear working class programme is easy for the state to deal with. Some bourgeois representative will soon leap up with false and empty slogans that democracy will solve everything. With no alternative of their own rioters might be pacified by such demands. In others the lack of clear organisation and clear goals simply lands the workers back in the despair from whence they came. After a few days the movement fizzles out to nothing and the state moves back in to reclaim the streets it lost.

As the capitalist crisis deepens the incidence of riots like those mentioned above will increase. Revolutionaries must resist the temptation to greet them as the beginning the revolution. They should not on the other hand ignore the elementary sparks of consciousness which are contained in this basic form of resistance to capitalist class rule. Our task must be to aid the participants in those movements to understand the broader nature of the issues at stake and to link them to other struggles in a systematic and organised way. It is only when we are organised that the capitalists have anything to fear.

## International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

The Platform and statutes of the Bureau are now available in English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Bengali and Farsi. The Bureau also publishes a central organ in English, **COMMUNIST REVIEW** as well as **Revue Comunista** in French, **Internationalist Notes** in Farsi and **Prometeo** and **Battaglia Comunista** in Italian. Please write to the appropriate address below (PCInt for **Internationalist Notes**)

CWO BM Box CWO, London WC1N 3XX.

Partito Comunista Internazionale, CP 1753, 20101 Milano, Italy.

Please send local currency OR if writing from abroad **INTERNATIONAL MONEY ORDERS** (within the sterling area postal orders are acceptable). We regret we cannot cash ordinary cheques as the international banking system takes \$9 out of \$10 for doing this). This applies to **Workers Voice** subscriptions too.



# Italy - the Battle Against Unemployment Goes On

## The Present Situation in Italy (CWO Introduction)

Normally the Italian political scene is a closed book to the British media. A land of excitable, arm-waving Mediterraneans; the home of the Pope and the Mafia, notable chiefly for the miraculous survival of its parliamentary set-up which has seen more than 50 changes of government since 1946. Recently though the 'serious' press has been having a bit of a field day reporting on the graft and corruption which is suddenly being revealed as an endemic part of the Italian political system. Scandals associated with the two parties which have dominated political power since 1946 - the Christian Democrats and the Socialists - are almost a daily occurrence in the Italian media. Together with the 'wind of change' following on the collapse of the Eastern bloc they are indeed the sign of a 'crisis of credibility' in Italian democracy. In the absence of any immediate threat from the working class, the Italian middle class is indulging in a bout of self-recrimination. Demands for a clean-up of the system and greater democratic control have spawned a search for new alternatives. Hence the success of the Northern League which has benefitted from the exposure of corruption within the Socialist-run local government of Milan and is playing on Northerners' opposition to the corrupt central government in Rome spending their taxes in the less-developed South.

The media here just report the Italian political crisis at face value they make no attempt to explain its underlying cause. Corruption amongst politicians is not new. Unlike in Britain, there is much less hypocrisy about it and it is taken as normal behaviour for anyone who wields political power. So why the sudden concern of 'public opinion' (i.e. largely the media) to expose the 'tangenti' (a gangsters' rake-off) and purify the system? The answer is to be found in the specific conjuncture of sharpening economic crisis and the aftermath of the dissolution of the Italian Communist Party following on the collapse of Eastern Europe. As the strongest pro-USSR party in Europe during the Cold War, the Italian CP, despite its commitment to Eurocommunism and the continuance of NATO, was still seen as a threat to political stability in the West. Now its Social Democratic rump (or more precisely, the Party of the Democratic Left) - with its leader, Achille Occhetto, mouthing the obligatory democratic platitudes of the 'post-Communist' new world order - if not out of the game, is no threat to it. It's no longer necessary for the Christian Democratic and Socialist Parties to form a bulwark to prevent the Communists getting a majority in Parliament. The Italian bourgeoisie can now afford to expose the failings of the previous mainstays of the system. In this sense the crisis is not dire. In many ways it is being used to divert attention from a more intractable and severe problem: the economic crisis.

Italy hasn't escaped the effects of the crisis of world capitalism over the last twenty years.

Unemployment, especially in the south, is high and the working class has experienced a deterioration in living standards and working conditions. In particular, during the Eighties the unions negotiated away the 'scala mobile' which had hitherto linked wages automatically to price rises and at the same time accepted the job losses demanded by the bosses as they introduced new technology and tried to offset falling profit rates. Having avoided the kind of wholesale destruction of its industrial base that occurred in Britain during the Thatcher

Many workers, demoralised by the failure of the unions to defend their interests over the past decade or two and perhaps also further disillusioned by the collapse of the Russian economy (equated with Communism), are unable to see any alternative but to accept what the bosses throw at them. Others though, are recognising the necessity of putting up a fight - even if they know they cannot rely on the unions but can't see any alternative to them. Still others - those who make up the diversely politicised minority of workers are

making more concrete preparations for a struggle 'from below', outside of the old union structures.

So far so good. With the rejection of the old unions by a sizeable minority of militants it seems we are already on positive ground. Would that the way forward for the working class were so straightforward!

For revolutionary internationalists it has been an axiom for decades that the real function of trade unions is to **CONTAIN** the class struggle and secure the conditions for continued capital accumulation. This is not simply the product of bureaucracy and jobs-for-life union leaders. Certainly these are signs of the the trade unions integration into capitalism but the essence of trade unionism is to try to **reconcile** the

irreconcilable - the interests of capital and the interests of the working class. These interests are never more contradictory than at times of economic crisis.

Clearly, a new version of the old unions is not the answer. Workers must organise themselves from below - yes - but not just in order to hand over the defence of their interests to new 'negotiators'. Class solidarity means fighting as a class, across sectional, industrial and ultimately national boundaries. However correct the reasoning here - and we believe it is correct - it is not very concrete. For workers whose experience has taught them that the likes of CGIL, CISL and UIL will only sell them down the river, the initiatives taken by a minority of militants (but a minority amounting to hundreds) to form alternative "non-bureaucratic" and "democratic" trade unions are becoming increasingly attractive.

The prime instigators of this alternative trade union movement are militants of the ex-Communist Party: both from the Communist Refoundation and the PDS. Neither have revolutionary aims. Both are concerned with the survival of the national economy - i.e. capitalism in Italy - and take for granted the

continued existence of the present state. In true populist spirit they are more concerned with avoiding class conflict than winning the class struggle. (For instance the opening address of *Rifondazione* at its national assembly in February stressed the need for urgent measures to be taken "to avoid destruction of the social and productive fabric" and went on to stress the need for "an economic policy which acts to strengthen the general productivity of the system".) Both have also jumped on to the radical democratic bandwagon and in the workplaces are using it to try and build up their own power base. Already in January this year alternative trade unionists from a wide range of industrial sectors, factories and regions came together to form the CUB - *Confederazione Unitaria di Base* - whose professed aim is to become the fourth biggest union confederation, in competition with the others.

Despite the democratic trappings and the stress on unity from below, the CUB is not the outcome of a mass workers' movement and it does not operate on the basis of the active participation of the rank and file. The militants involved are essentially union activists who have been expelled or who have boycotted the old unions but whose modus operandi is essentially that of reformists. Some were expelled for their oppositional activity inside the old unions - such as FIM, expelled from CISL (the Christian Democratic Union Federation) in Milan. They have been schooled in the techniques of 'fake opposition' to union deals: opposition based, not on mass action by the majority of workers but by petitions, court cases, referendums and the like. In other words, the CUB represents a dangerous side-track for the working class in Italy as a whole.

As this alternative trade union movement was getting off the ground, other militants were pressing for workers as a whole to organise themselves in genuine base committees, as the necessary prelude to putting up an effective resistance to the bosses' attacks. In Milan these militants are already linking up and at the beginning of June the first meeting of the workers COBAS (coordinating committee of



Bribes: "They're taking them straight from our wage packets!"

years, the Italian state has instead built up one of the biggest per capita debts in the world. Now the working class will have to pay. Stringent cuts in public spending are already underway. Meanwhile, industry, whether privately or state-owned - Italian capital has not made a fetish of privatisation - is obliged to mount further attacks on its workforce in order to remain 'competitive'. Despite all the restructuring of the Eighties massive redundancies are again on the cards.

Instead of acknowledging that the Italian economy is part of a world-wide crisis which is refusing to go away, the blame is being put on the graft and corruption within the government and established parties. Partly this is self-deception on the part of a section of the Italian bourgeoisie: a search for a simple, popular and populist solution to a much deeper malaise. But media focussing on the current political scandals is also a way of diverting 'public' attention from the attacks on living and working conditions which have already begun. Moreover, the poison of bourgeois democratism - the idea that democratising the existing system will cure everything - is spilling into the factories and workplaces.

## Communist Review

End of the Cold War and Moves Towards a New Imperialist Line-up

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workers from below) took place. They are an echo inside the working class of the COBAS movement which took place in the state education sector a few years ago: a movement outside of and against the unions.

Like all living expressions of struggle, the workers' COBAS of today do not have a clear understanding of the intrinsic anti-working class nature of trade unionism. Moreover, the COBAS is the result of initiatives by the more politicised militants - the advance guard of the class - and as such is composed of elements from various political tendencies, some of whom hold to the idea that it is possible to build revolutionary unions. Be that as it may.

So far the Milan COBAS has shown a healthy scepticism towards the rush to form a 'new' union already prepared and packaged" for the workers by someone else.<sup>2</sup> Their stress is rather on the formation of unified councils of workers' delegates elected by the mass of workers - whether union members or not - and subject to immediate recall by the majority.

We will discuss the issue of struggle groups and the Milan COBAS in a future issue. Meanwhile, we are publishing the document below as an illustration of how class-conscious militants in Italy are working to build up the fighting strength of their class in order to prevent a repetition of the defeats which

workers throughout Europe have suffered over the past decade. This particular document is from militants in a Fiat factory near Naples. Despite the improved automation and restructuring of the workforce in the Eighties which made Fiat plants the most productive in Europe, the company is once again in crisis. In June it announced that its Chivasso car plant in northern Italy will close in September with the loss of 5,600 jobs. Last autumn workers at the Iveco plant received their redundancy notices, inspiring the formation of the coordination committee who produced the text below. As yet the majority of workers in Fiat, as elsewhere, have remained passive. Yet, as they say in Italy, "something is moving". In order to give our

readers some idea of what is happening and to extend our solidarity to those who are struggling in Italy for a genuine mass resistance to capital's attacks, here is Battaglia Comunista's Introduction and the text of the Iveco document itself.

#### Footnotes

1. Quoted in a report on this meeting in *Battaglia Comunista* 4, April 1992.
2. The quotation is from a criticism of the CUB by the Milan COBAS.

## Introduction by BATTAGLIA COMUNISTA

The document below is the report of a co-ordination committee of the *Cassa integrati* (workers made redundant)\* of the Iveco vehicle works at Flumeri (Campania). The report was presented to a meeting of 150 workers from crisis-ridden factories in the Avellino area last February. The co-ordination committee itself was formed in the autumn of '91 on the initiative of a group of workers who were opposed to a redundancy agreement which specified there could be no short-time working.

### HISTORY OF THE CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE

The basis of the agreement is that 500 workers are to remain fully redundant for a period of two years. Of these, about 300 will almost certainly remain outside of the production process for the whole period. The others will be recalled from time to time, depending on the orders for coaches the firm gets.

The first leaflets - signed simply "some workers of Fiat-Iveco" - describe a struggle inside the union which was defending the agreement it had made and arguing that at the end of the two years the workers will be re-employed. But the crisis of the vehicle manufacturing sector is a fact and Fiat was trying to encourage workers to take voluntary

redundancy. Meanwhile the atmosphere inside the factory was getting gradually worse. It was becoming increasingly clear that hundreds of workers would be made idle and thus laid-off. (From four to five hundred.)

At this point (last summer) the same group of workers - all of them trade union members - began to use the works canteen as a means of calling for action. (As happens in many Italian factories.) There was a good response from the workers to this proposal but it clashed head-on with the union which as a body denounced the initiative. However, it went forward and resulted in 700 out of 1400 workers signing a petition in favour of taking the company to court. This was an alarm bell for the union and its opposition to the initiative duly sharpened. With it came explicit threats of expulsion to the workers who had promoted it.

In short, they were obliged to form the *coordinamento* (co-ordinating committee) and to link up with other workers outside of and against the unions. The *coordinamento* included both laid-off workers (in the *cassa integrazione*) and workers still employed inside the plant. As a start-off it called meetings (which were well-attended) to launch the slogan, "Rotate the *Cassa Integrazione*", thereby denouncing the real role of the union.

Expulsion of trade union members began to rain down (FIOM, UILM)\*. Meanwhile, the *coordinamento's* proposals were ignored. These were: an intransigent defence of jobs, rotation of workers laid-off, for the link-up with other factories in crisis. It was in one of these assemblies that the following document was read out, a document which we are charged with defending wherever possible.

This report has already been distributed in the principal factories of Milan, in Pavia, at Mirafiori (Turin) and throughout Reggio Emilia. This, as we said in our accompanying leaflet, is because:

*It is appropriate that workers in other factories take similar action and establish direct contacts with those struggling at Fiat in Valle Ufita, a situation which resembles that of so many workers where the bosses are laying off and making people redundant without anyone seeing an alternative.*

As we always say, it is up to the proletariat's advance guard to compensate for the silence of the bourgeois press about workers' struggles. Here is one such example.

### OUTSIDE AND AGAINST THE UNIONS?

There was a lot of discussion inside the *Coordinamento* about how to oppose the unions.

As early as last autumn some workers proposed leaving them while others (the majority) were in favour of pursuing the struggle without excessive formalism since the reasons for this would not be clear to the mass of workers. So far the question remains unresolved. Moreover, *Rifondazione\** also has an 'interest' in the situation at Fiat. One of their workers in the *Coordinamento* stood as a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies (Italian Parliament) and since the organisation is still very weak the whole thing could be drawn away from the workers' own terrain. However, such a course - at least at the outset - is almost inevitable in such situations. We should not underestimate the capacity of initiatives like that of *Rifondazione* to cloud the issue. Still, the *Coordinamento* has already proved itself a new and positive element. Indeed, it represents a break with the past as regards relations with the union, the framing of clear objectives, the organisational capacity to act autonomously (the assemblies, for example, were completely self-organised), the superseding of any narrow localist standpoint, the practical search for workers' unity and the realisation of the necessity to link up with other workers in similar situations. This is no small thing. We hope it won't be everything.

## THE REPORT

The Coordinating Committee of those laid-off in the *Cassa integrazione* scheme is trying to promote concrete ways of realising the demands already outlined in the last meeting. Those demands and the actions proposed then can be summed up as follows:

1. First of all - and there is no alternative, given the situation which now exists at Fiat Iveco of Valle Ufita - AN INTRANSIGENT DEFENCE OF JOBS. Concretely, we are saying: "Not one job must go." We thus reject any "agreement" reached over our heads, any

compromise which involves in one way or another the expulsion of workers from the factory. This is what the agreement between Fiat and the unions really means and why we have publicly denounced it. In practice it gives Fiat complete freedom to go ahead with whatever measure it thinks necessary, starting with the implementation of a plan to reduce the labour force which would lead to the expulsion of hundreds of workers from Fiat Valle Ufita. This, in spite of all the assurances to the contrary and above all, in spite of the huge amount of public money Fiat has already

had and is still liberally drawing on with the excuse that it is bringing work to the Mezzogiorno (south).

It is not necessary to dwell on this to see that our first demand makes sense. The reduction of the employment roll at Valle Ufita would have disastrous results for us workers:

- for those laid off it would mean being thrown directly onto the streets without any real prospect of finding work;
- for those remaining in the factory it would mean the prospect of being laid off whenever and however it was convenient for Fiat. Moreover, they would clearly be in a weak position vis-a-vis the company and even more susceptible to blackmail and pressure than they are now.

Therefore, we must hold firm to our readiness to take effective action so that no job is lost.

In keeping with this is our demand that the *cassa integrazione* be operated in rotation - as even the notorious law 223\* allows for. This would at least give a certain amount of "guarantee" to all the workers and would avoid them being divided into those with jobs and those without. That's the game Fiat is playing to weaken us and undermine our unity. On the other hand, solidarity is the starting point for any action aimed at defending our rights. Indeed, we could even add that there is no better guarantee than our own struggle.

*continued on back page*

## OUR BASIC POSITIONS

1. We aim to establish a stateless, classless, moneyless society without exploitation, national frontiers or standing armies and in which "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (Marx): COMMUNISM.
2. Such a society will need a revolutionary state for its introduction. This state will be run by workers councils, consisting of instantly recallable delegates from every section of the working class. Their rule is called the dictatorship of the proletariat because it cannot exist without the forcible overthrow and keeping down of the capitalist class worldwide.
3. The first stage in this is the political organisation of class-conscious workers and their eventual union into an international political party for the promotion of world revolution.

4. The Russian October Revolution of 1917 remains a brilliant inspiration for us. It showed that workers could overthrow the capitalist class. Only the isolation and decimation of the Russian working class destroyed their revolutionary vision of 1917. What was set up in Russia in the 1920's and after was not communism but centrally planned state capitalism. There have as yet been no communist states anywhere in the world.

5. The International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party was founded by the heirs of the Italian Left who tried to fight the political degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the Comintern in the 1920's. We are continuing the task which the Russian Revolution promised but failed to achieve - the freeing of the workers of the world and the establishment of communism. Join us!



# Workers' Potential Power ... ... and the Unions' Real Power

After years of being held up to workers in other countries as a shining example, the German working class has moved. No longer can our bosses tell us that if we behave like "the Germans" we would have our "own" economic miracle. Not only have German workers struck, and, if only on the face of it, won, but British workers have behaved in a stereotypically "German" fashion for several years now, with very few strikes and without anything at all "miraculous" happening in the British economy.

But, back to the German strike. Like most struggles, this ended in a mixture of defeat and victory, and in this case it was mostly defeat. More precisely, what was won in the strike was a very tiny fraction of what could have been won, and the union was to blame for that.

## Behind the Strike

Workers' wages in Germany have been being dramatically eroded for several years now, with the "normal" effects of the crisis being augmented by the costs of unification. Unification is being paid for by increased taxes, and most of this is being paid by workers - resentfully, of course. Although inflation is officially 4.8%, food inflation is felt to be in the range 12-20% (according to workers asked by *The Independent*, 3rd May). For example, milk has gone from 99 Pfennig to 1 Mark 34 Pfennig in three months (*Independent*, same issue).

In these circumstances, trouble was clearly brewing, and especially amongst public sector workers, who are paid 10% less, on average, than comparable workers elsewhere.

In common with many countries, Germany has a formal wage round, and this year the public sector employers (who are the governments of the *Länder*, or local states) offered 4.8%, which was a considerable provocation.

## The Union

In this situation, the public employees' union, the ÖTV, obviously knew that if it did not act, something would happen anyway, and outside their control. Moreover, casting its eyes abroad, it must have seen the slump in membership in unions elsewhere, which would have been a powerful incentive to be seen to do something.

What it did was to call a ballot over whether to strike over the bosses' offer. The vote was 89% in favour of the strike, which went ahead despite an offer of 5.4% made by a mediator (but Chancellor Kohl "advised" the *Länder* to stick at 4.8%, putting the higher offer in doubt). Many local sectors of the workers insisted on demands of over 10%, to make good the losses they had suffered earlier.

The strike was solid throughout ex-West Germany, but solidarity action (rather than feelings of sympathy) was kept to the level of "Warnstreiks" both outside of public services and in ex-East Germany. More importantly, with a few exceptions, where workers came out despite being told to work by the union, the strike was entirely under the control of the ÖTV. Many workers only knew what was going on outside their own workplace by watching TV. This meant that workers got an impression that their own power was the

power of the union.

The ÖTV's strategy was of calling workers out selectively. Despite spectacularly halting airports by calling a handful of workers in the fire crew, this idea meant that the union could limit the damage caused by the strike elsewhere; for example, it called out some postal workers, and had the remainder give priority to business mail. Even though at some points in the eleven day strike 400,000 workers were out, this strategy meant none of the control of the strike was in the hands of the workers, and even those who were out spent their time at home, isolated from other workers, or at most queued for strike-pay.

The way the strike ended was the best proof that the strike was entirely an affair run by the union, for the union's aims. The employers improved offer was accepted by the ÖTV, despite the fact that Kohl put it at 5.12%: it was sufficiently complicated that Monika Wulf-Mathies, the ÖTV leader, could claim it was 5.7%. A ballot was held on acceptance of this offer and over 55% of workers rejected it. The union's constitution enabled it to completely ignore this result and this is precisely what it did! If the strike had been the workers' affair, there is no way that this could have happened.

## Conclusions

The unions have a reactionary rôle everywhere, reflecting their position in the productive process. They sell their members' labour-power, and this puts them firmly in the ranks of the capitalists. The most they can do is defend this rôle within capitalism, and so they protect capitalism itself. When it is a question

of the wages of their members, or the profits of the capitalists, they unhesitatingly protect profits. Apparent contradictions to this can come about when it is a question of protecting their own particular capitalist interests, or when their closer links to the working class enable them to better see than the other capitalists how much is necessary to concede to keep the workers under control. Even in these cases, they exercise a moderating influence on the demands of the workers, and sabotage their struggles.

In the German strikes, the ÖTV defused the struggle of the workers by taking the leadership of it and leading it into a dead end. It did this both to defend capitalism as a whole and to increase its membership. It succeeded in both, for, although many militant workers are bitterly disappointed in the result of the strike, other, less militant workers have been impressed by the formal victory and have joined. The more militant workers, in the absence of a revolutionary opposition to the unions, have nowhere else to go.

Despite all this, there is something positive here. Although it is partially obscured by the apparent power of the unions, the real power of the working class has been demonstrated, and at the same time it has again been shown that in Germany, as in Britain and every other country in the world, the unions are no use even in the defensive struggle of the working class. To fight back, the working class must be deaf to capitalist demands that it be "responsible" in its struggle and respect the need of capital to make profits - because this means respecting capital's need to suck the working class dry. But unions respect this need by their very nature.

## Italy:

# The Fight Against Unemployment

*continued from page 7*

We think we have made these things clear in previous assemblies. We workers are all in the same boat, all on the same side. Any attempt to introduce divisions amongst us will work to the advantage of Fiat.

Given the crisis situation, nobody can consider themselves out of danger, not even by running to the mafiosi boss on their shift. This is the reality which everyone would do well to get into their heads. Only our unity, around clear positions in defence of jobs and living conditions, can represent a real obstacle to Fiat's plans.

2. Another of our aims concerns the changes to law 223 on mobility: a real con-trick, organised at our expense.

Even in the most developed areas of the country so-called 'mobility' is hardly a practical option today. In the south it is absolutely out of the question. For us 'mobility' is a joke since it can only mean unemployment.

Obviously, fulfilling such an ambitious aim will require the mobilisation of all the workers,

well outside of Valle dell'Ufita or all our Campania region. We need to find a way of unconditionally defending our living standards. Above all, we need to recognise the need to directly organise ourselves. The swindlers we have continually put up with and who are supposed to represent our interests show that we must learn to be more active, more ready to fight, more willing to organise of our own accord in order to defend our interests which have been so badly represented.

We have already said that we want the maximum mobilisation of the majority of workers. However, we ourselves are workers and we aren't going to stand around doing nothing. In our own small way we are organising ourselves and preparing to fight back.

Further, the *Coordinamento* intends to liaise - and in fact is already doing so - increasingly actively with workers in the same boat in other provinces and regions. Overcoming isolation by extending links with other workers is one of the most important things workers in our position can do today. This undermines the logic of those who wish to see us divided,

separated section by section and factory by factory, in order the better to beat us and force us to put up with whatever they throw at us without a murmur.

The fact that our own unity is the first, elementary, step and a strengthening factor is evident by the small example of the canteen disoute, where, by moving en masse, we showed that we could put Fiat on the spot - so long as we move with determination and as a body.

3. As agreed during the last meeting, the *Coordinamento* intends to start its practical opposition to what's going on in the factory by calling a general strike for the province. The strike must be the primary weapon for defending jobs, fighting the lay-offs already announced and refusing the mobility con-trick. However, it is only a practical weapon to the extent that workers and organisations of self-defence from other factories and the province as a whole are involved.

The Coordination Committee of the Cassa integrati of Valle Ufita.

## Glossary of Italian terms

*Cassa integrazione*: a long-standing scheme agreed by unions and management amongst the largest and more 'respectable' Italian firms. Until recently workers laid off would receive

first 100% and then 80% of their wages whilst joining a 'stand-by' scheme whereby they would be the first to be offered re-employment if and when the company expanded its workforce. Today the period of the cassa integrazione is limited to two years after which they receive nothing. (Official unemployment benefit in Italy is no more than a derisory token - worth about the price of a packet of cigarettes.)

FIOM and UILM: Trade unions. Respectively, Federation of Metalworkers and Italian Labour Union. The FIOM is affiliated to CIGL, the old Communist Party's union network while UILM is the Socialist Party's metalworkers' federation.

*Rifondazione*: *Rifondazione Comunista*, or Communist Refoundation. The minority of the two organisations resulting from the dissolution of the Italian Communist Party (CPI). Still equating a centrally-planned economy with socialism, their aim is to re-establish a revamped version of the old party. Law 223: An agreement reached between the unions and bosses which has passed into law and which redefines the situation of workers made redundant with no prospect of re-employment (previously illegal) as simply one of "between jobs" (*mobilità*). Hence the bosses are protected from possible law suits by dismissed workers.