

WORKERS VOICE

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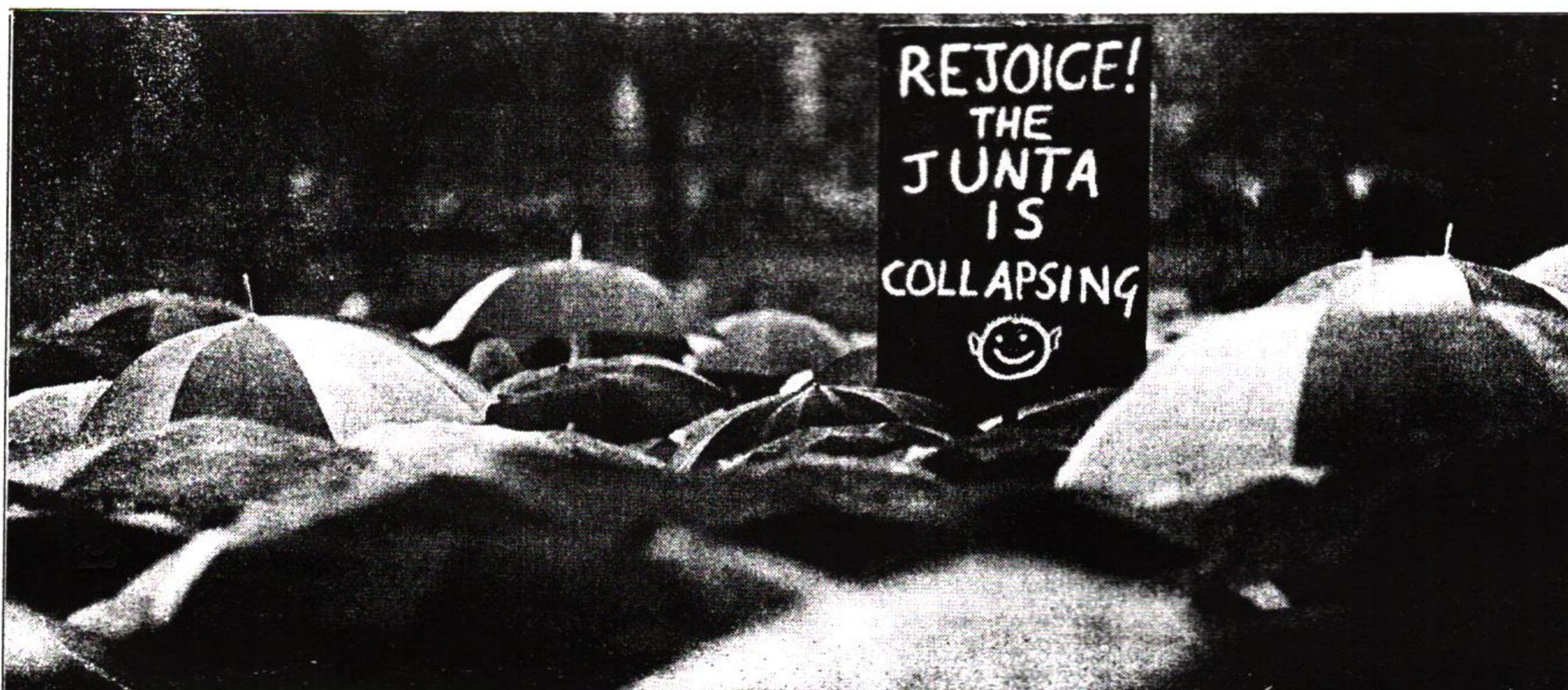
Class Struggle not TUC Campaigns Strikes are the **ONLY** way to defend ourselves from the attacks of the state

The announcement of the 31 pit closures in October demonstrated that the will to resist is still alive in the working class. At least 150,000, the biggest demonstration since 1886 in defence of jobs, took place on October 25th. Despite the element of middle class support, the vast majority of those taking part were wage labourers and wageless labourers. Many were white collar or former salaried workers who now face the same kind of attacks that the rest of the class has faced for fifteen years. Increased insecurity, and worsening working conditions are now proletarianising many workers who once thought they were immune from redundancy.

Saying that the working class exists though is saying little enough. Since the pit closures were announced there has been a further avalanche of redundancies. Ford, DanAir, Barclays Bank, IBM, BP, Peugeot, British Rail, Blue Circle cement, local authorities, schools, hospitals are only some of the areas where jobs have gone or are forecast to go in the last few weeks. This explains October's wave of anger and underlines the vital need for workers in every sector to fight together.

But nothing that has happened since October

Below: Premature Labour movement celebrations trying to divert workers from the real struggle to defend living standards



has been much of a threat to an incompetent government. Heseltine, under pressure from his own backbenchers backed off from the instant closure of the 31 pits. Union leaders told us this was a victory. But the Government has simply bought itself time. The December High court ruling that British Coal and the Government acted illegally was also hailed by unions as a victory. Once again nothing has happened. In the 10 pits closed abruptly in October the deterioration in the coal faces means that by the time the 90 day "consultation" period is over at the end of January production cannot be restarted anyway. Rockfalls in some pits had already buried thousands of pounds worth of equipment by the middle of November. Once the period of consultation is over the pits won't be in any fit state to resume. The Government then wins anyway.

The Question of Confidence

Postponing the issue explains a lot about why

from an industrial economy in crisis. 1992 saw the lowest number of strikes and the lowest number of strike days lost since the Thirties. The deliberate encouragement of homeownership has seen a 10% rise in mortgage holding in the last decade accompanied by an average debt of 110% of income per person. Those sections of the working class which had enjoyed relative job security in the public sector have seen the first introduction of compulsory redundancy. It is little wonder that, despite the initial great wave of anger in response to the pit closure announcements everyone is waiting for everyone else to be the first to lead a genuine struggle.

Why no miners strike?

Of course everyone looks to the miners to go on strike first. And here the particular legacy of the 1984-5 strike hits home directly. Lets not forget how much the miners sacrificed in that strike. 800 were jailed by our wonderful courts, thousands were fined. The British State spent more on attacking the miners in the first 6 months of the strike than it had done in attacking the Falklands. In September, 1984 we wrote

This dispute has now become the longest, most bitter and most important class battle in Britain since the First World War, surpassing even the General Strike of 1926. And just as the battles of the British working class from 1918 to 1926, through their defeat opened the way to the pauperisation of the workers and a new imperialist war, so today the miners' strike poses the question of the crucial and stark historical options opened by the crisis; war or revolution.

Workers' Voice 18 p.1

Though we were criticised at the time for this

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The latest blight on the globe we are being invited to become guilty about is Somalia. For years now as disaster after disaster hits one spot on the atlas after another, famine in Ethiopia, war in Mozambique, cyclone in Bangladesh, Afghanistan, the Kurds, the Shiites, we are invited to bemoan the effects of such "natural catastrophes" and, for those who like to look a little behind the headlines, bemoan the fecklessness and the sheer greed of the elites in power in these countries who se unwilling, unable, to use the resources of the country they had at their command to repair the damage and organise things so that it doesn't happen again.

Africa is the continent most often brought to our attention, where things are worst, where are people are dying not merely in their tens and hundreds of thousands but continuously, year after year, month after month, day after day, where such as OXFAM tell us that £1.00 donation from us would make all the difference, where our individual contribution would allow these areas to escape the cycle of poverty and starvation. Tosh! These catastrophes aren't natural for the most part, they are the result of the domination and control over these areas by the great powers since they were first entered, captured, enslaved and exploited by the west over a hundred years ago. Where the actual catastrophe is natural that set the murderous cycle off, the drought, the cyclone, the failure of the rains, the fact that the infrastructure is unable to cope with such an occurrence, unable to solve such specific problems, unable to prevent the collapse of the entire economic and social infrastructure as a consequence is directly the result of the fact that these areas are ruled as outposts of the capitalist empires by local, comprador capitalist thugs, who are in power so long as they do as they are told, with the pillage of the country as their reward.

The Real Culprit

It is the capitalist world economy and system that condemns these areas to starvation not the winds or the seas. Africa is the best example, if 'best' can be used to describe such a horrific situation. The essentially self sufficient agricultural systems of the countries of sub saharan africa were destroyed by the colonialist powers and transformed into cash crop economies for the most part, where there was a cash crop which would grow there. Instead of subsistence farming the populace were either marginalised into the poorer agricultural lands or dragooned into the large scale farms and cities producing a crop for the world market, coffee, cocoa, tobacco and the like. Instead of being isolated to a considerable degree from the vagaries of the world market they were now at the mercy of world prices. As the world economy stumbled and fell into recession during the seventies and eighties these cash crop areas were the first to be squeezed dry by the metropolises until, the juice sucked out, they were spat out by the world economy, to lie discarded, dessicated on the sidelines. From being often exporters of foodstuffs, breadbaskets of the continent, they have turned into starvation zones. Worse, most of these states had borrowed heavily in the hope of becoming even more integrated into the world

economy and to sate the thirst for wealth that their parasitical rulers had developed a taste for. At a political level the collapse of the mainstays of their economic structure threw the general populations into utter poverty and their rulers into a desperate search for more loans and for a means to live in the lifestyle to which they had become accustomed. Many depended on the continuing struggle between the rival imperialist blocs of the US and USSR to earn them a crust. The ferocious competition between these two meant that arms and aid poured in wherever they were in contention to arm and support local gangs/armies in their murderous brushfire wars that littered the sixties, seventies and eighties outwith the capitalist metropolises. However once the Russian bloc had collapsed and the crisis in the world capitalist economy showed no sign of abating, indeed showed every sign of getting deeper, once it was clear that the debts could never be repaid, once it became clear that aid was no longer going to come, like the ships of the New Guinean Cargo cults, out of the horizon then all hell broke loose.

A Capitalist Constructed Hell

Thousands of armed men, whole armies, armed to the teeth by the two blocs to fight their wars suddenly no longer had a sugar daddy to keep them in style, they had to turn on the local populations with a vengeance to screw everything they could out of them - but precisely at a time when these, even in the richest countries were suffering too the effects of the capitalist crisis on their cash crop based incomes, or in such areas as Somalia, largely untouched by such considerations, where the barely subsistence economy was suffering from the periodic droughts that afflict such desert and semi desert zones. Such countries began to feed on their own entrails and wrought redoubled devastation on their crippled economies and emaciated populations. The paper tiger of the horn of Africa was Ethiopia. As the Russian bloc began to feel the cold winds of economic failure in the seventies its policy of supporting anti US regimes and oppositions wherever and whenever they lifted their heads had to be abandoned on grounds of cost. It was replaced by the selective support of pro-Soviet regimes in key locations within important geographical zones and the fomenting of unrest in neighbouring pro-western neighbours. Thus Nicaragua in central America, Cuba in the Caribbean, Angola and Mozambique on the northern borders of South Africa, Libya and Syria in the Middle East, Yemen in the Gulf, Afghanistan in central Asia and Vietnam in

Somalia: Humanitarian Rescue or Imperialist Graveyard?

South East Asia. Ethiopia after the fall of Haile Selassie in 1974 to the Dergue was to have this role in the Horn of Africa. Addis Ababa supported and funded anti-US regimes along its border in the Sudan and elsewhere. US response was to support the many local "liberation" movements in the Ogaden, Eritrea etc and to pour weapons and aid into Somalia (which had also been a Soviet proxy at one time), transforming the country into a loyal US bastion under its dictator Siad Barre, so that it could, with direct US marine help, invade eastern Ethiopia in the seventies. With the fall of Mengistu in Ethiopia there was no further need to spend money in Somalia to oppose a threat that no longer existed and the country was left to rot, to join the other abandoned economies of the third world in their descent towards the barbarism that their abandonment by the beleaguered economies of the west condemned them to. By the beginning of the Nineties the mafioso who ran the country had become desperate. They had been able to survive, in a land with no natural resources to feed on after the withdrawal of western support, on filching the humanitarian aid destined for the famine stricken areas of the country which periodically were devastated by droughts which crippled the subsistence economy there. As the west, facing up to its own problems had reduced support for the gangsters of Somalia they had come more and more to depend on the aid arriving at Mogadishu. So when a major famine erupted instead of allowing the odd ten thousand or so to starve by stealing their food now up to two million are facing starvation because the gangsters are preventing the food getting through. The state has completely collapsed into rival gangs of thugs fighting each other for the goodies on offer. The former strong man Siad Barre was ousted by the 'capos' of a rival clan leaving his son in law precariously holding on to parts of the south of the country supported by Moi, the dictator of Kenya. Meanwhile the victors fell out amongst themselves over the spoils and control, of Mogadishu where the supplies come in. A third and a fourth set of gangsters hold other, less significant parts of the country. All are armed to the teeth with the masses of small arms both the US and the Russians supplied to Somalia in years gone by. Thus we have witnessed all the factions slaughtering each other, while the rest of the populace starves to death, to gain control of the vital ports where the ships land the aid, where they can steal it and charge the aid agencies \$20,000 a day protection money each. Out of a population of somewhere between 5 and 7 million, no one is really sure, there have been about half a million war related deaths, 2 million are starving, another two million are refugees. Famine and its relative, disease in the form of virulent measles, malaria, tuberculosis are ripping the heart out of the people of Somalia. All the horsemen of the Capitalist Apocalypse are here. In essence however the country, though in a dreadful shape is no different from a variety of other states abandoned by the west after having served their purpose in the cold war and now being driven into utter and total barbarism, torn apart by rival gangsters, deeply mired in disease poverty and starvation. But there is one difference, one conundrum.

The Role of the US

The US have not felt it necessary to invade

anywhere else in such straits. No vital strategic or economic interest lie there to be saved. The economy is semi pastoral and there are no natural resources worth having. There are no vital strategic interests here. Unlike what some sections of the milieu think there is no enemy fleet in the Indian Ocean any more to be prevented from using Mogadishu harbour, nor are the French there as opponents of US dominion, indeed they are a constituent part of the US-dominated force now landing on the Somali beaches. Nor is the US interest a humanitarian one. This has never been a consideration of US imperialism in the past for if it was then we would see the paradox of paradoxes - a benign capitalism which seeks to undo disasters it is directly responsible for! But there still is the conundrum of why the US has committed ground troops. Possibly it is an attempt, in the season of spurious goodwill, to show the human face of the world power that only a year or so ago was slaughtering Iraqi civilians in their tens of thousands. More likely it is a safe way (given the strength of the likely opposition) of demonstrating that the US can intervene whenever and wherever it pleases on the globe. It has the capacity the will and the wherewithal. In particular it demonstrates to any group of states contemplating setting themselves up in opposition to US hegemony that they have the UN firmly in their pocket and can do whatever they like. So watch out! Just as in the Gulf War the USA is using the UN as its legit front, but it is clearly now seeking to operate under the aegis (fig leaf) of the UN in a much more organised fashion than it did in the Gulf War where it was to be seen huffing and puffing to get the votes and commitment it needed from others. It has the UN and its new Secretary General toeing the line much more obviously now and is clearly seeking an open mandate and organisational structure so as to be able to utilise the UN when it intervenes when and where it chooses to in the future. Sec.-Gen. Boutros Boutros-Ghali is keen to see such a set up organised:

Now is the time . . . to seize the moment for the sake of the future

The *Independent on Sunday* quoted him as having:

a bold plan for a military arm that would punish cease-fire violators, guard borders, roll back aggression.

The United Nations Association of the USA has a very clear vision of what this would mean: 1000 elite troops from one or two nations under permanent UN control backed up by a Rapid Deployment Force of tens of thousands on call from a few nations.

And which nations? Retired General Edward Meyer, one of the architects of the plan says that:

UN operations are going to be one of the central roles of all forces, but especially US forces because of what US forces can do.

Somalia, 'Operation Restore Hope' seems to be a tryout of the new organisational structure that will police the USA's new World Order. But possibly there is a whiff of US domestic politics involved here too. Bush put the troops in, gaining the applause for his humanitarian vision - but it will be his rival Clinton who is left to get them out, whether they will have

The Palestinian Expulsions

No Peace in the Middle East

As we have written in previous issues of Workers' Voice, the so-called "peace process" in the Middle East, which began with the Madrid Conference, is little more than a reflection of the new requirements of imperialism after the demise of the Soviet Union. To put this in more concrete terms, the USA as the currently unchallenged leading imperialist state requires a pliant Middle East in order to provide the best conditions for the control of the supply of oil.

However the nationalist rivalries and aspirations fuelled so long by the Cold war cannot be made to disappear overnight. When the Israeli Labour Party came to power last June, on the basis of a peace platform, it appeared that a tenuous settlement giving only strictly limited autonomy to the Palestinian ruling class in the occupied

territories would be signed. Under pressure from the USA the Israeli rulers now led by Yitzak Rabin actually promised to conclude an interim peace deal within nine months. But the expulsion of 415 Palestinians in retaliation for the murder of one Israeli policeman by the Islamic fundamentalist group, Hamas, has thrown the whole process into disarray. Even by Israeli standards of brutality (which are normally far more vicious and selective) this amounts to an unusually clumsy reaction. So what is behind it all?

These expulsions were not simply designed to satisfy demands for action within Israel (this could have been achieved by more limited means) but also to drive a wedge between the "moderate" secular Palestinian leadership who support the peace conferences which includes the PLO, and the Islamic fundamentalist who

reject any idea of peace with the state of Israel. The Israeli message to the Palestinians was, fall in with the peace conferences or face more brutal terror. The autonomy plans offer the Palestinians little (they naturally offer the Palestinian working class nothing at all) but the PLO has missed the chance to get a few crumbs so often in the past that this could be the last chance. In other words to play on the increasing desperation of the traditional Palestinian rulers. The Israeli government would also be free to formally recognise the PLO for the first time as the good guys who were not extremists (this has already been the situation de facto for several months). And on a purely direct level the expulsion of 400 Hamas militants could be expected to weaken that group's organisation within the occupied territories. Furthermore the Israeli state thought it could get away with this by taking advantage of the declining influence of the Bush administration in its last days, especially as Clinton's Democratic Party has traditionally taken a more pro-Zionist stance than the Republicans.

What Israel could not have bargained for was Lebanon's new-found determination to admit the expelled Palestinians as they had previously done in the past. This move by Lebanon's Syrian-backed government was certainly aimed at causing maximum embarrassment to Israel by making the expulsions a major issue, but was also in part motivated by Syria's own fears about Hamas (a few years ago an Islamic fundamentalist rising in Syria was suppressed with great bloodshed). Assad, the President of Syria did not contemplate the prospect of 400 more Islamic militants in the Lebanon with any

pleasure. Now that these 400 men are stranded on a bleak hillside the immediate result of the expulsions has been exactly the opposite of that intended by the Israeli state. Instead of dividing the Palestinian camp, the expulsions have had a unifying effect as exemplified by the meeting of the usually antagonistic leaders of Hamas and the PLO. The widespread support in the occupied territories for those expelled has made it impossible for the Palestinian peace negotiators (in reality, the PLO) to continue the dialogue with Israel.

So it appears that just as the Palestinians were about to accept a deal with the Israelis, Israel's actions have scuppered this prospect and given succour to a far more militant anti-Zionism as represented by Hamas as well as curtailing the PLO's scope for flexibility.

In the twisted and cynical world of imperialist diplomacy in a world in which the old certainties of the Cold War have been exchanged for a far more fluid political situation, the outcome of this latest development remains to be determined. One thing however remains certain. No peace, no resolution of the present horrors inflicted round the planet by a decaying capitalism can be quickened by workers and communists siding with their "own" bourgeoisies. Only when the artificial frontiers of imperialist manufacture are dismantled and Arab and Jew, Christian and Muslim workers sit down together to administer this pivotal part of the world will there be peace. But the fundamental fact for this is the abolition of capitalism and all its bastard nationalist ideologies.

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Yugoslavia - The Juggernaut of War Grinds on

bourgeois, beings. The major imperialist powers will not go to war unless they are convinced that there is no alternative solution to their ills (and as no such alternative exists for them they will soon be convinced!) The Yugoslav bourgeoisies have already reached this point but the world bourgeoisie has not. They believe, with less and less conviction, that international cooperation can solve their economic crisis. Because of this they are fearful of destabilisation despite the fact that the bourgeoisie of each individual state also hopes to profit from it.

It is the fear of destabilisation which is forcing the US towards full-blooded intervention as the Balkan disruption threatens to spill over the borders of the former Yugoslav state. The conflict seems more likely to spread in directions which do not interfere with Germany's immediate interests but which are possibly even more dangerous: Serbia versus Albania over Kosovo, Serbia versus Macedonia, involving Greece and possibly, Turkey Serbia versus Hungary over Vojvodina etc. And it is the US' desire to profit from this de-stabilisation which has made it run the gamut from intervention via the UN, which is both impotent and untrustworthy, through considering intervention via NATO, which is possibly more powerful but hardly less trustworthy these days, to consideration of direct intervention. Because the US is less concerned about Croatia and Slovenia its "line in the sand" has been drawn over Kosovo:

In the event of conflict in Kosovo caused by Serbian action, the United States will be prepared to employ military force against the Serbs in Kosovo and Serbia proper.

Bush's letter to Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic and General Zivota Panic (quoted *Guardian*)

Or, in short, the US will take the offensive against Serbia proper if it attacks Albanians in Kosovo, whereas;

The US is prepared to use military force to respond to interference with humanitarian relief deliveries in Bosnia.
ibid.

This gives the game away. Far from bringing

peace the US' projected intervention will bring death to the population of Serbia, and, make no mistake this means the workers of Belgrade who will suffer the same fate as the workers in Baghdad.

Suppose, against all that we have argued, an active intervention by the US (or by its NATO/UN surrogates) did bring peace. Would this intervention administer a pacified ex-Yugoslavia for the benefit of German imperialism? If a UN or NATO intervention did this the stresses brought into the heart of these organisations would either break the intervention or the organisations themselves. A US intervention would at most make a few concessions to Germany. But as cooperation between the major powers reveals itself to be more and more powerless to halt the march of the economic crisis, so these powers themselves will tread the path trodden by the ex-Yugoslav bourgeoisie. The concessions will become too small for Germany to accept and too large for the US to give. In short, active US intervention would merely accelerate the emergence of the tensions on a higher level.

The Future

Ex-Yugoslavia today shows the workers of the whole world one possible future. In the past Yugoslav workers have fought a joint fight against the austerity plans of their previously united ruling class. The barbarity that these bosses have employed in attempting to destroy the unity of the Yugoslav proletariat demonstrates how far they are prepared to go and how far they needed to go to defend their interests. That they have been able to do what they have done is one more lesson to the effect that proletarian unity in struggle is not enough; the proletariat also needs a political arm in the struggle against their exploiters. This political arm, this party, provides a reference point for workers' struggles, demonstrating that all capitalism has left to offer is more barbarism, and that there is a realisable alternative, on condition that the bourgeois state is smashed across the globe, communism.

Footnote

1. The three states have 87% of the foreign

investment in Slovenia whilst Germany has just financed construction of 4 new container bases at Pula (Croatia).

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Somalia: Imperialist Graveyard

achieved their objective or not. And what is it they are there to achieve that would allow them to leave with it fulfilled? Unless they can secure some sort of peaceful political settlement the anarchy they are there to quell will simply return when they go. As the Supervisor of one Feeding Station put it:

If the Americans leave soon the story of stealing and looting will return.

But how can a political settlement be achieved which would prevent a return to the status quo? Certainly not the fantasies of Newsweek quoting a US Ambassador in the region who sought to:

create such an atmosphere to allow unarmed political forces, intellectuals, clan leaders, womens groups to emerge to lead Somalia towards political reconciliation.

But such a "political reconciliation" (more like political miracle!) would require the total disarming of the present gangsters and the recruitment of a new set of gangsters to defend the "good guys" and - what no one in the US State Department wants - a massive injection of capital to Somalia to pay the new bosses.

The real issue for the US ruling establishment is not aid to Somalia but a quick fix which will go at as a warning to the world. The US is ready to intervene militarily anywhere and everywhere to bolster its declining economic fortunes. It is the Japanese and the German bosses who will have to take note of this message. It is a far cry from the new world order and the kinder America Bush promised only a few years ago.

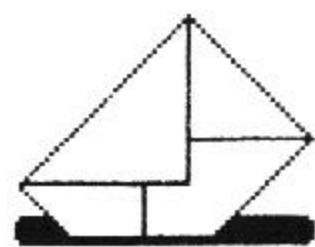
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Letters to the Editor

Political debate and discussion are the lifeblood of any organisation which wishes to be part of the formation of a revolutionary class consciousness. Workers' Voice appeals to all readers to become an active part of that process by sending in their comments and criticisms. All will be printed (with initials only) and where necessary replies furnished.

Anti-Racism and Communist Politics

Dear WV,

I was interested in the article in WV 63 which outlined your response to the upsurge in racist violence. The article raises a number of issues which I think need further consideration. The call for "autonomous groups of workers to expel racists from their neighbourhoods" highlights three main problems.

Firstly, the article makes no reference to how the fight should be organised in the workplaces. Is this merely an omission or does the author see different issues at work in those different situations?

Secondly, I am concerned about the definition of a "racist". There is a strong case for arguing that within late capitalist society the vast majority of white workers within Europe are likely to have certain identifiable racist ideas. Indeed, it would cast doubts about the prevalence of bourgeois ideology if it were otherwise. It therefore becomes a nonsense to talk about expelling racists from working-class, or any other neighbourhood.

Perhaps the writer really means that those who organise or participate in racist attacks should be driven out. This would still leave unclear areas about whether particular attacks are

Dear KT

Thanks for your letter. Point taken. What we said about autonomous groups of workers also goes for workplaces although we should have made that clear. Actually what we were trying to stress is that defence of those areas (or workplaces) should be the task of the workers themselves and not some frontist recruiting racket for the SWP or the Labour Party.

On the issue of "what is a racist" we mean someone who is an active threat to working class existence. We agree that no communist should get themselves involved in fronts to preserve capitalist democracy (that was the point of the article) and any activity has to be set in that context (this goes beyond the anti-racist issue). Our whole framework is that at every level we defend those activities which reinforce the autonomy and unity of the class.

As to your last point - your letter is already on its way to Italy!
Editor

"racist" or not.

The final area of concern partly overlaps with the previous point about workers combatting racist thuggery. My first response is that the desire of Communists to involve themselves in working-class action is an essential product of correct Marxist theory and practice. On the other hand, the Communist Left has always been concerned to distinguish independent class action from those cross-class activities (e.g. anti-fascist fronts) which confuse workers and deliver them to their class enemies.

Although the author clearly distances him/herself from the Anti Nazi League or similar frontism, the actual practice suggested in the article would need to be constantly reviewed to avoid being drawn into that left capitalist quagmire.

It seems to me that the article itself is nevertheless very valuable because it raises significant issues about how organisations of the Communist Left are to react to the upsurge in racist violence. It would be instructive and useful to hear more about the practice and experiences of the comrades in "Battaglia Comunista" over recent years.

KT
Sheffield

Resignation from Labour Party and Entryism

We are printing here the resignation letter written by former Labour Party activist in Sheffield who is now working with the CWO. The author is a former Trotskyist who joined the Labour Party because of political guidance from an entryist political faction. During his years in the Labour Party the organisational pull of Labourism increased and he gradually lost formal contact with his Trotskyist mentors, becoming increasingly absorbed in Labourist electoral activity. The letter itself clearly underlines that the Labour Party in which the working class once had such hopes (however misplaced) is a capitalist party in both theory and practice. It needs no further introduction.

Dear A...

...you will be writing to me shortly to request a report ... to the Ward Labour Party. Although I have not yet received any letter I trust that this note will explain my position.

The fact is that if I still felt any affinity to the Labour party you would certainly be receiving far more than reports.

In particular, over the last few months I would have been trying to point out that the actions of the City Council in slashing services and throwing workers on the dole is a disgrace. I would have been trying to show how the leaders of the Labour movement both locally and nationally quite consciously organised against a working class response to job losses in the mining communities - instead of focussing on cross-class unity to help prop up this wretched social system. I would have continued to express my horror at the gut-wrenching charades in the local District Labour Party meetings where the civic leaders prattle about Socialist services whilst planning the next cut.

However these latest out and out betrayals are nothing new for Labourists - so what has changed? Bluntly, I have changed.

When I joined the Labour Party in 1976 I believed, exactly as I do today, that capitalism can only offer misery to the vast majority of the world's population. I have also not moved an inch from believing that the only future for humanity is the world-wide overthrow of capitalism by the working class. Unfortunately,

I was persuaded at that time that Marxists should join and build the Labour Party and that this was somehow serving the class struggle. It is this last belief which I now firmly reject.

Since I became politically aware I understood that the Labour Party was a capitalist party (i.e. its existence and history is entirely one of maintaining and preserving capitalism rather than overthrowing it). However I believed that Marxists had a duty to work with **all** the organisations of the existing Labour Movement. That activity in the "broad church" led me to working as a loyal Labour Party member, (even to the point of accepting nomination to Council Candidacy and sitting as an administrator of the local capitalist state) whilst at the same time attempting to raise differences in strategy and tactics with the hope that somewhere along the way a genuinely anti-capitalist current would emerge.

I am now of the opinion that the duty of Marxists is to clarify rather than blur our differences with the politics or practices of parties such as the Labour Party in Britain or its sister "Socialist" or "Social Democratic" parties.

A number of people have commented that I was abandoning positions in the Labour and Trade Union movement because of demoralisation. Nothing could be further from the truth.

For myself, I am far from demoralised. I am firmly committed to rebuilding a Communist Internationalist movement capable of overthrowing the rotten and corrupt capitalist system which is destroying humanity. The seeds for such a movement will not be found in the 57 varieties of Stalinism, Trotskyism or Maoism who have stolen the name of Communism only to trample it in the mud.

An individual's decision to leave the Labour party is of little significance. Indeed it may well be welcomed by a number of individuals in the local branch.

I understand as well as anyone that there is a big comfort factor attached to membership of the Labour Party. I am no longer prepared to be blinded by the easy option.

There is only a tiny minority of Marxists with an analysis which can genuinely point the way to a future for humanity. However that is nothing new and will not prevent us from making our mark in transforming human history in a way that the millions of hours wasted by Labourist support for capitalism can never do.

I have had to cut through miseducation and confusion about the real meaning of Marxism. If any local members wish to find out more I will be delighted to discuss with them.

Yours sincerely,

K.

An Anti-Fascist Fiasco in Sheffield Union Bureaucrats Endanger Workers

Readers may be interested in the recent antics of the anti-racist/anti-fascist movement in Sheffield. If workers are looking to avoid leftist, anti-racist blind alleys they would do well to learn from these escapades.

The story revolves around the appointment of one Simon Chadwick to a job in a Sheffield dole office. Chadwick's main purpose in life, however, was not to make sure that unemployed people got their Giro's on time. His main activity is to act as an organiser for the racist thugs of the British National Party in nearby Chesterfield.

Once Chadwick's activities had been exposed in a recent edition of the Anti-fascist magazine, "Searchlight", the leftists sprang into action. Operating primarily under the Anti-Nazi League banner they pressurised local officers of the main Civil Service trade union (CPSA) to

launch a campaign. As it happens these same officers have presided over the loss of hundreds of jobs from the Department of Employment Group (Dole Offices etc.) in Sheffield over the last 12 months. The Chadwick campaign was an ideal opportunity for them to re-establish their credentials so campaign they did.

Of course there are campaigns and campaigns. No way would these Union hacks and their cheerleaders around the Trotskyist left look for workers to organise independently in the Dole Office or anywhere else. Strikes were not organised and neither were workers encouraged to drive the racist scum from the workplace by other means (e.g. introducing his head to the nearby pavement).

Instead of working-class activity the local TUs claimed victory (a victory also claimed in the

pages of "Socialist Worker") when they persuaded Dept of Employment management to sack Chadwick because he had lied about previous criminal convictions.

It was not long before management showed the leftists the real nature of their 'victory'. Within a couple of weeks they had started disciplinary procedures against two leading local CPSA officials on trumped-up charges connected with the Chadwick affair. The possibility of disciplinary actions, possibly up to sackings, looks a real possibility.

Trade Union Trickery

The sum total of the Trade Union's trickery has been to shuffle the racist out of the job without either the workers or Chadwick feeling the real

strength of working-class organisation against racist thuggery. The other element of their 'victory' is to reinforce management's confidence in their ability to discipline and dismiss whenever it suits them. If those involved in manoeuvring with Management against Chadwick are sacked, workers should take strike action immediately. However, they should be quite clear that they are striking not to defend the treacherous Unions or their jackass officers but to fight back against the rights of management, whether running state or private capitalist enterprises, to sack workers at will.

C.W.O. Public Meeting in Sheffield

Red October 1917

A Part of Our History They are Trying to Bury

On November 7th, the seventy-fifth anniversary of the workers' revolution in Russia, the CWO held a public meeting in Sheffield. The celebration of the October Revolution is all the more necessary today given the lies spouted by the capitalist press about "the failure of communism" in the Soviet Union. It was not communism that failed in the Soviet Union. It was a stagnant, bankrupt state capitalist regime where all the main features of capitalism, exploitation of wage labour, money, the market existed in one form or another. True, this was different from classical capitalism as seen in nineteenth century Britain, but then today capitalism could not exist anywhere if it were not for state interference and regulation. The specific form of capitalism in the Soviet Union arose not from the victory of the working class but from the eventual defeat of the revolution that was launched in October 1917 (November 7th by the modern calendar).

The CWO speaker introduced the topic by looking at the way successive anti-working class views of the revolution have dismissed the October seizure of power as a coup d'etat by a small group of armed conspirators. These ideologically-motivated misinterpretations (recently reconfirmed by Channel 4's broadcasting of Eisenstein's 1927 film "October") don't even fit with the basic facts. The Bolsheviks who led the final overthrow of the capitalist and war-mongering Provisional Government of Alexander Kerensky were not a small group of conspirators acting alone. They had the support of 80% of the delegates to the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets. The Congress ratified the overthrow of the Provisional Government immediately. It should be remembered too that this Provisional Government had been publicly informed a fortnight earlier by the Bolsheviks, Kamenev and Zinoviev, that the Bolsheviks intended to seize power. The Provisional Government simply could not find enough troops to defend itself. There were hardly any casualties in the takeover of power and the actual insurrection was not started by the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet. It was Kerensky's provocative attempt to seize the Liteiny Bridge which led to the Vyborg working class district of Petrograd which led local soldiers to move against him. Already prepared for such an event, the working class led by the Bolsheviks were not slow to support them. Even after Kerensky left Petrograd to get troops to fight back he could find few supporters. As Martov, a Menshevik rival of the Bolsheviks, concluded "almost the entire proletariat supports Lenin". Moreover, if the Bolsheviks had only been interested in seizing power for themselves they could have done so in July when the Kronstadt sailors wanted them to, but they recognised that though they would have been successful, the working class was not yet politically prepared for such an act. Hardly the action of putschists. In the events of the autumn of 1917, when the Bolsheviks led the defence of Petrograd against the White General Kornilov, the working class concluded that the Bolsheviks were their real hope.

The second great myth put about particularly, by anarchists and councilists, is that the Bolsheviks were not really proletarian at all. They only pretended to be in favour of soviet power, for workers' control and for the abolition of exploitation as a way of winning support amongst the most class conscious workers whilst in reality they aimed all the time to set up a dictatorship of the Bolshevik party. There is not a shred of evidence for this view (but plenty of evidence to the contrary). It arises only from the empty-headed effort to blame the subsequent failure of the workers' revolution entirely on the Bolshevik Party. In fact the Bolsheviks were uniquely the expression of the highest level of revolutionary consciousness of the working class, not only in Russia but also in world in the period 1914-17. It was the Bolsheviks, inside and outside Russia who decided to "turn the imperialist war into a civil war". It was the Bolsheviks who led the fight against the massive betrayal of the working class by the other Social Democratic parties of the Second International (as well as anarchists like Kropotkin) at the start of the First World War in 1914. It was the Bolsheviks who recognised that the February Revolution in Russia had made their old programme out of date and accepted a new, revolutionary, one based on Lenin's *April Theses* in 1917. It was Lenin, the Bolshevik leader, who called for the workers to smash the bourgeois state and replace it with a proletarian one which he

believed would quickly "wither away" as the world revolution advanced.

Nor was the model of the highly-disciplined homogenous party put about by Stalinist propaganda in the late twenties and thirties, any nearer to the truth. The fact is that the Bolsheviks were a living embodiment of proletarian consciousness with all the richness of debate and discussion which that entailed. It was this feature which enabled them to constantly correct errors and respond to events as the drama of 1917 unfolded. It was this proletarian character which enabled them to maintain the semblance of going forward even when the horrendous conditions created by imperialist war, Russian capitalist backwardness and the so-called civil war of 1918-20 reduced the revolutionary workers of 1917 to tattered remnants.

Revolutionaries today know that the conditions for revolution are different and that any attempt to ape the Bolsheviks will only lead to caricatures of really revolutionary positions. But we cannot deny the history of our class, especially its most triumphal moment. The revolution ultimately failed. By 1921 the original working class had all but disappeared. As Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin and Rosa Luxemburg had all written before March 1918 (when 14

was a tendency for nationalisation (the state ownership of property) to be confused with socialisation (the management of enterprises by workers on behalf of the whole community), for state capitalism to be seen as a step towards socialism (instead of a form of capitalist conservation) and the Council of Peoples Commissars did begin to act more as a government outside of the control of the soviet power. But these errors could all have been reversed had the revolution continued to extend itself. The blows which came when the German Revolution was defeated in March 1921, when the famine of the civil war forced the introduction of the New Economic Policy and a revival of the market in grain cannot be underestimated. At the same time the Bolshevik Party which had never ceased debating and arguing throughout the civil war period now accepted a limitation on discussion with the formal banning of factions at the Tenth Party Congress. Although this was in fact a paper ban (factions continued to live inside the party until 1927) it paved the way for the stalinisation of the party in the last years of Lenin. Even at this point the revolution could have been revived had the Third International, founded in 1919, managed to extend the revolution in Europe. But as the years slipped by the Third International became an instrument for disciplining the other communist parties into accepting "socialism in one country" and a mere instrument of the imperialist foreign policy of the growing state capitalist power in the USSR. Instead of being a focus of revolution the Comintern actually strangled the independent revolutionary prospects of many of its constituent parties. With its adoption of the "united front" tactic in 1921-2 the Comintern began the long road back to the social democracy which Lenin had led it from in 1914.

Our speaker concluded by saying that it was for fighting these signs of the degeneration of the October Revolution that our predecessors in the Internationalist Communist Left were expelled from the Comintern. But they never ceased to point to the significance of the October Revolution for the future of the working class.

The Lessons of October

As we have already stated there will be no revolution like the Russian experience again. Any revolutionaries who seek simply to slavishly replicate it deserve only ridicule (as do those Trotskyists who consider the question of leadership to be just a question of the right individuals in strategic positions).

What the October Revolution has given to us is the knowledge that proletarian emancipation is not just a fine idea but a practical necessity to extract humanity from the present capitalist barbarism of war and famine.

In the shape of the soviets the Russian proletariat showed us how to resolve the problem of personal freedom within planned collective production in a mass society which will have no specialised ruling class. They are organs which, in time, are capable of changing the whole basis of human existence and with it human consciousness. But we will not rid ourselves of the muck of ages overnight.

October 1917 underlined what Marxists had maintained - that a period of transition will be necessary before we can claim to have arrived at socialism. Capitalism cannot be overturned by decree. And any idea of "socialism in one country" is a reactionary chimera. Instead there will be a period in which capitalist economic laws are dismantled at the same time as the geographical area under the control of the

working class is extended. During this period working class power will operate through soviets which cannot delegate to anyone, not even the working class political party the task of refounding society on new bases. As Lenin stated in 1918;

...socialism cannot be implemented by a minority, by the Party. It can be implemented only by tens of millions when they learned to do it for themselves.

However the establishment of soviets is only the beginning of the story. The existence of soviets doesn't mean the existence of communism. The Petrograd Soviet, for example, followed bourgeois parties for six months of 1917. The soviets are the arena in which the struggle for communist consciousness has to be fought. This is why the class conscious workers have to unite themselves into a political party to guide the struggle towards communism.

Discussion: Subversion's Anti-Bolshevism

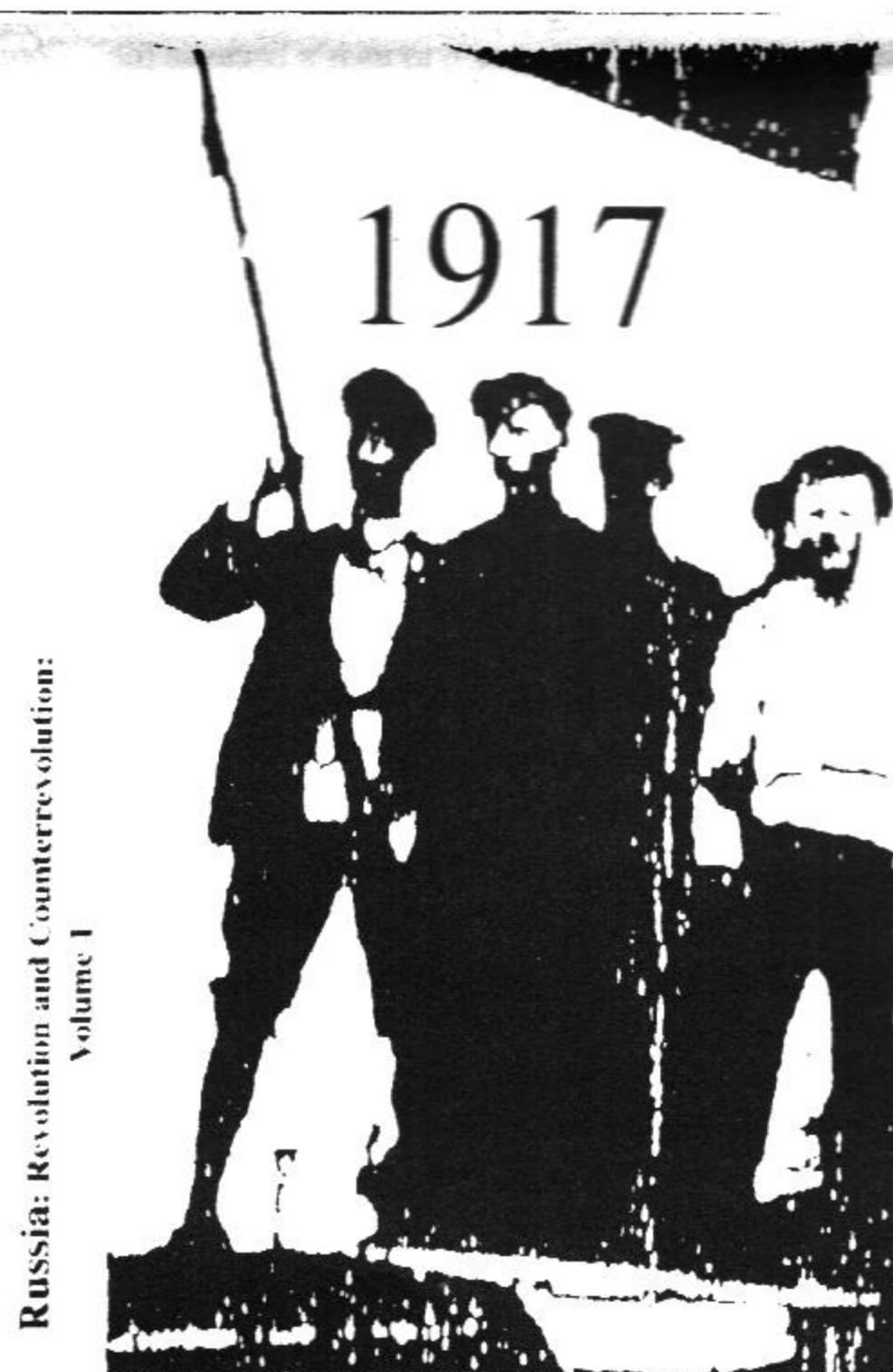
From the discussion that followed most of those present accepted this basic outline. However debate soon focussed on the contribution of members of the group, Subversion. This group had recently reprinted a CWO leaflet on the pits closure campaign and distributed it at miners meetings in Lancashire. This is welcomed by us. Even so, we still find the lack of coherence in what Subversion stand for remains a real political barrier between us. This was further underlined by their contributions to the discussion.

At first one of their members tried to maintain that October 1917 was a proletarian revolution but it had "very soon" become bourgeois. Another maintained that there had been proletarian elements in the October Revolution but these could not be identified with the Bolsheviks. We asked them to identify the non-Bolshevik proletarian elements. They responded "the working class". We asked them to identify a specific action carried out by this amorphous working class which had not been under the Bolshevik leadership. They could not. We pointed out that even most working class anarchists in 1917-18 recognised that Bolshevism was the highest expression at that period of the working class and joined the Party.

What the comrades seemed fixated on was the fact that the Bolsheviks did not have the perfect communist programme as seen from the vantage point of 1992. They demanded that the day after the seizure of power by the working class in a single area (however devastated or backward) the entire communist programme should be implemented. Any idea of a period of transition from capitalism to communism was in itself deemed reactionary. They put great store in quoting Lenin, when he was arguing against the Left Communists (a group Subversion seem not to have studied), from March 1918 when he stated that state capitalism would have been an advance on what the Communists had so far achieved. For them this single quote (robbed of any context) said it all. The Bolsheviks were not Communists.

When a CWO comrade pointed out that it was ridiculous to judge the Bolsheviks of 1917 by the lessons which we only learned from their experience the comrades just brushed the problem aside. They were constantly asked to identify who was more proletarian than the Bolsheviks but also thought this a non-issue. In brief what they maintained was that the real revolution made too many mistakes and that they could make a better revolution in their imaginations. This is why Subversion can arrive at a solution which is both utopian and reactionary - the idea that there need be no period of transition between capitalism and communism. It is utopian because communism can only be built once the workers have a communist consciousness - something they won't inherit en masse from the capitalist system. It is reactionary because it is the basis for the idea that socialism can be established in a limited area whilst capitalism still exists in other parts of the planet i.e. it is "socialism in one country" by the back door.

What this exchange did demonstrate, at least to those not in Subversion, is that only when we learn from the experience of the workers who took part in the last revolutionary wave will we be able to forge a proletarian party capable of acting as a guide in the next revolution. In this sense, as Rosa Luxemburg said in 1918, 'the future everywhere belongs to Bolshevism'.



Russia: Revolution and Counterrevolution: Volume 1

CWO Pamphlet Number 2.

Price £2

Volume One of our History of the Russian Revolution is available at £2 from the group address (see p.8). Volume 2 will be available shortly.

imperialist armies invaded Russia to destroy the new-born Soviet Republic) the question of socialism could only be posed in Russia, it could not be solved in Russia. Whilst the backwardness of social relations, in which the mass of the peasantry played an enormous part in determining the fate of the revolution, were important, the real deathblow came when the revolution remained isolated in Russia. This is the prime cause for the failure of the workers in Russia to go on to establish communism. It was the clearest proof yet that socialism in a single country is impossible.

Recognising the objective limits of the Russian experience doesn't mean that we ignore the weaknesses that Bolshevism developed. There

Open Space

Since we started our Open Space the only group not organisationally connected to us to take advantage of it has been the Communist Bulletin Group. Today we give the space to an individual, an ex-ICC comrade and follow it with our reply. The CBG contribution is the article on Somalia. A word of explanation. Given the recent practical cooperation between members of the CWO and CBG in the pit closure campaign the two groups met in Edinburgh in December to discuss the implications of this cooperation. Politically the CBG accepted that the Platform of the IBRP did not stand as a barrier to political work whilst the CWO clarified what it meant by a centralised organisation in the present period. A number of misunderstandings were cleared up on both sides. It was therefore decided to make the practical cooperation more formal. An

agreement was drawn up which the CWO as a whole will have to ratify in January (after which a more complete report will be issued) and included the following points.

1. The CBG were to make regular agreed contributions to Workers Voice and receive all editor's reports (the same went for leaflets etc)
2. CWO quarterly meetings to be opened to CBG members after January.
3. The two groups to discuss a "popular platform" being drafted by a CWO comrade as an instrument of intervention. CBG to give written response before a meeting in June 1993 to monitor progress in joint work.
4. The Leeds comrades of both organisations to prepare this meeting.
5. Joint public meetings to continue with all other groups of the Communist Left based in the UK welcome to join in.
6. This agreement to be at least briefly reported in the next WV.

Idealism, Communism and the Communist Left

Letter from M.

Dear Comrades

In your last issue, in the article on the ICC and the Italian Left, you mention that you "gave him (Marc) an uncritical obituary". I don't know what you thought - or think - about the CBG's obituary, but I think it was right to salute his positive contribution (*MC and his contribution to the clarity of Révolution Internationale and their intervention in that milieu gave us this critical dimension which allowed vital regroupments to take place*), and make the criticisms it made, especially on the question of organisation. It is obvious that Marc (and the ICC with him) came to trample in practice the organisational principles which were supposed to determine the inner and outer life of the organisation [1], and it was - and is - important to say it. Otherwise you feed the idea that communist politics can only be that sort of practice: monolithism, sectarianism and so on. It's not a minor question, it's a fundamental one that can determine whether there is - or is not - a political life among revolutionaries and within revolutionary organisations themselves. That's why I saluted the CBG's "Death of a Communist". The best way to honour past revolutionaries is to carry on the work for revolution, and this includes asserting your own truths and expressing the criticisms you think necessary to make the way forward clear.

And that's why I quite agree with the criticisms you make of the ICC's sectarianism (you don't use this term but the idea is the same) in your *Open Space* page in WV N° 62 (M.Jr.'s letter and your introduction).

But I was surprised to see that you criticise the ICC for being "idealist"; all the more so as, when I was in the ICC, its central organs demanded that I shut up because my views were "idealist" and alien to the ICC's positions. So a few words about idealism [2].

If what you criticise as "idealism" in the ICC it's *difficulty in distinguishing its own ideological formulations from material reality, its own mental schemes from real life*, I would agree.

But the text says: (The ICC) *represents the subjective, idealist wing of the class movement. The working class movement is a historic fact and independent of anyone's will. It can be oriented towards the realisation of its historic programme by those vanguards which are the bearers and elaborators of that very programme but it doesn't end with those vanguards.*

I agree absolutely with the idea, which is the main point of this text, that *it doesn't end with those vanguards*, that *different views about the same class interests always exist and it would be absolutely idiotic to deny it as well as to deny their right to exist*. But I want to raise another question: I think there is a contradiction in saying at the same time that *the working class movement is a historic fact, objective and independent of anyone's will* and that *it can be oriented towards the realisation of its historic programme by those vanguards ... If it can be oriented* that means that the subjective factors, here the work of the vanguards are determinant, or at least, do have an influence, and that therefore the working class movement isn't as independent of anyone's will as you say!

According to your vision (which is shared by most of the "milieu") it's *only* the contradictions of capitalism - it's crisis - which push the workers to struggle to defend their living conditions, and it's only in situations of struggle that revolutionary ideas can find some audience. Therefore the main task of revolutionaries is to study and analyse the evolution of capitalism and the its crisis, to observe and comment on the struggles that take place, to wait for a situation of generalised struggle to emerge, since they are regarded as an "objective fact"; and it's only in such situations that "subjective factors" can intervene and that a party of cadres wins over the majority of the proletariat through its clarity. (I would ask, by the way, what's the use of having a regular intervention if subjective factors play no role at all in the *working class movement, objective and independent of anyone's will*?)

I think that such a vision comes from a superficial vision of history: it is true that it's in situations of open struggles which have been going on for a while that the influence of revolutionary parties has grown and become preponderant. But that does not mean that their ideas had no influence at all *before*, during the period which prepared such moments, and in the struggles themselves. Their influence was obviously weaker, hardly visible, confused, "subterranean" [3] but there is an undeniable link between the revolutionary wave of 1917 and following years and all the "educational work", as it was called, done by

Social-Democracy after the end of the 19th century. We mustn't forget that most excellent "classics of Marxism" were written in that period and with that purpose. Even if it was not always clearly and utterly expressed, even if it was not even really conscious for everybody, the fact that there existed a revolutionary programme, vague though it was ("Democratic Republic"), which represented something that was worthwhile fighting for, could but have an encouraging influence in the emergence of defensive struggles themselves and, of course, in their revolutionary dynamic. The influence of subjective factors was also demonstrated in a negative way, since it was thanks to the nationalism of Social-Democracy that the First World War could take place.

I think it's a big mistake to regard the working class movement as a purely "objective fact", whatever the period (ironically this amounts to regarding the working class with the eyes of the capitalist class; like mere objects). History has over demonstrated that the economic crisis of capitalism is a necessary but not a sufficient factor for conscious class struggle. Why didn't the terrible crisis of the 30s or the post-war years give birth to a revolutionary wave? Because communism was identified with Stalinism. Why have our expectations been disappointed up to now in spite of the catastrophic crisis capitalism has been in for more than twenty years? Because of the absence of any positive perspective worth fighting for. Those are subjective factors, factors related to consciousness and therefore to "idealism" i.e. the realm of ideas, the capacity to know what you want even if it doesn't exist yet, the capacity to have "an ideal", i.e. a revolutionary programme.

Besides, if we admit the idea that today "the objective conditions are ripe" and more than ripe for a communist revolution, then it follows that what is preponderant is the subjective factor, which is the proper responsibility of revolutionaries.

That's why I don't agree with your criticism of the ICC's, or any other revolutionary group's "idealism" because, by definition "the subjective idealist wing of the class movement" (or do you think you are an *objective factor*, just like the crisis of capitalism?)

What have to be criticised are the ideas put forward. Like, for example, the idea that if there have not yet been revolutionary struggles in this period it's because the economic crisis is not yet deep enough, which amounts to saying "it's not really our fault that we are not bigger than little sects: we have the programme, we have the clarity, if the workers don't listen to us it's because the situation is not yet tough enough". This reasoning does not stand: first, the havoc produced by the economic crisis has already gone far beyond our expectations (well, you can deny this idea but not the real havoc the world is already in) and second, this situation can also provoke fratricidal struggles like the ones we see in the ex-Eastern bloc and even in western Europe (against immigrants). In fact this vision only serves to justify revolutionaries' own weaknesses and to prevent a critical re-examination of their programme.

I would say that the main weakness of the communist movement nowadays is not to have been able to develop a more "concrete" (in the sense: related to reality) or "credible" (even if it can be but "ideal" as long as it won't be put into practice) answer to the question: how can we get 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.

The CWO/IBRP's answer is: through the *brilliant inspiration of the Russian October Revolution of 1917* because *it showed that workers could overthrow the capitalist class* (quotes from "*Our Basic Positions*"). Do you think that sounds convincing? I don't. Who can trust revolutionaries who see no difference between the world of today and that of 1917, concerning such vital questions as the development of the productive forces (hampered and distorted by capitalism's contradictions but which existed anyway) and the development of the proletariat itself, which has become the most "excessive" productive force? Do you find it convincing to say that the Russian Revolution showed that workers could overthrow the capitalist class? It is convincing if you have read a lot about the question and idealised it (most people haven't), otherwise what you see is that in Russia the capitalist class was only replaced by a worse, bureaucratic class which was embodied by the "Communist Party".

For the revolutionary programme to be trusted it should first be brought up to date. That's why I think the EFCC's invitation to debate on a new platform is a good initiative and that it shouldn't be disregarded.

Communist regards

M. 17.10.92

Footnotes

1. In fact here I disagree with the CBG's view which sees no contradiction between the ICC's behaviour and its principles. When you compare the contents of the ICC's *Report on the Structure and Functioning of the Organisation of Revolutionaries* published in *International Review* n° 33 (1983) and the actual practice of the ICC the contradictions are obvious.
2. Many revolutionaries feel obliged to criticise "idealism" because they regard it as a non-Marxist deviation: idealism as opposed to "materialism". But the materialist conception of history does not deny the actual influence of ideas in given situations. Materialism allows us to explain why these ideas exist, relating them to their concrete material basis, but it does not deny their role as an active factor in history. Marx even says that *ideas become a material force when they take the masses*. And the main point of the *Theses on Feuerbach* is to criticise *bourgeois materialism* which merely interpreted the world whereas *what matters is to transform it*.
3. The notion of "subterranean" is by no means "mystical"; it's the same phenomenon expressed by the image of the *old mole*. I think this notion describes the actual process of the formation of thought - or ideas - which can only become conscious if it is allowed to, by finding a place in a coherent framework. The proletarians (everybody in fact) are perfectly aware of the world's awfulness. But as long as they cannot fit this into a positive vision of the future which can put an end to that, most of their mental energy is spent in trying to forget, trying not to see this reality, or trying to accept the official ruling class' explanation of things. I think that the role of revolutionaries is to elaborate and present this positive vision of the future which allows us to consciously face and combat capitalism's reality.

Our Reply

Dear M

The ICC are right! You have an idealist interpretation of the role of revolutionaries. Lets try to examine this by looking at what you misunderstand in M. Jr.'s text. When he stated that

The working class movement is a historic fact, objective and independent of anyone's will.

He was merely re-stating an elementary truth of historical materialism, first expressed in *The Communist Manifesto* (*The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle*). Without such a material condition there would be no basis for any debate about what the proletarian interest really is. And this is what separates Marxist revolutionaries from all types of utopians.

The theoretical conclusions of the communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered by this or that would-be universal reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes.

There have been hundreds of millenarian visions in history but all presented only a vision. As to how the promised society was to be achieved they had no idea. And at the most extreme, of course, they took the religious road (pie in the sky when you die). Marx's contribution was to point to the inevitable end of bourgeois society due to its inner economic and social contradictions. However he was not a slave to the Victorian idea of progress. There was no inevitable victory of the proletariat as was stated in the *Manifesto*. The class struggle in each epoch would lead either to the *revolutionary reconstitution of society or the common ruin of the contending classes*. How successful the proletariat would be depends on the ever growing union of the workers into a political party. On this you must agree with us since you write that the party's ideas have influence *before* the revolution (and it was after all Battaglia's belief that the party must precede the revolution and not vice-versa which led to the formation of the IBRP).

However you also appear to think that the revolution is a question of a mere act of will on the part of revolutionaries. This is not the case. We cannot transcend the historical conditions in which we find ourselves. The distinction we make between the objective class struggle and our political intervention is at the heart of historical materialism. Look

again at the *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. After the bit about "being determining consciousness" he writes

At a certain stage of their development the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production... From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic - in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. *Marx-Engels Selected Works Vol 1 p.329 (our emphasis)*

However, you maintain that we tend towards vulgar materialism because you wish to pour scorn on the explanations put forward for the relative failure of revolutionaries in the present era. We think this shows that you come from the ICC. When the ICC was arguing that "the crisis was here" (and RI were doing so in 1967) we said no, or rather we said that this was only just the beginning of a process. They

argued at this time that the proletariat only needed to be "demystified" from its illusions in Leftism and it would take the revolutionary road. Both the CWO and BC (separately) were criticised for pessimism. Although we recognised that capitalism had reached the end of the third cycle of accumulation and that there would have to be a historical solution to the issue, we knew that generalised revolutionary consciousness is not directly a product of the economic crisis, although the crisis was the essential pre-condition for such a development. We considered that all other factors at that time pointed to continued bourgeois rule. BC pointed to the increased power of the unions over the workers after May 68 and we, in 1977, pointed to the credit mechanisms which would allow capitalism to spread the crisis out. By the end of the 70s we were both analysing the way in which the crisis was actually operating to the advantage of the bourgeoisie (the increase in unemployment acting like a disciplining factor, for example). In a world where the margins of capitalism create massive barbarism whilst at its centres enough of the working class (i.e. wage labourers) can be bought off and threatened into submission it is not surprising to us that the class have responded only minimally to the objective horror of the situation.

We should add too that we never insisted that

Yugoslavia - The Juggernaut of War Grinds On

The defeat of Milan Panic in December's Serbian Presidential election has been presented in our media as the end of all hopes of peace in the Balkans. But this is just propaganda. Under Panic's term as PM of "Yugoslavia", Bosnia's dismemberment has proceeded apace, and concentration camps operated without control by Belgrade. Panic was just a front for the butchering Serbian bourgeoisie and their scapegoat for their failure to build a reliable regular army.

The war started because the bourgeoisie on each side blamed the local effects of the world economic crisis on each other and could see no other option but to solve its problems at each other's expense. Today they still see no other option. Moreover, once the war started, no side could afford to lose. This was particularly true of Serbia. If Serbia lost to Croatia it would not only have to cede the territory won on the Croatian side of the old Federal boundary but probably an equal amount on the other side. In addition it would lose "its part" of Bosnia and face Albanian demands for Kosovo as well as

Hungarian demands for Vojvodina. The Serbian bourgeoisie's interests determine Serbian policy - not the outcome of elections.

The Militias

The war is being fought by irregulars because neither side can raise a trustworthy regular army as the passive resistance to conscription in the urban centres is very high on both sides (there are said to be 100,000 young people who have fled conscription in Serbia alone). Historically the Yugoslav working class has been less taken by chauvinism than any other because of its common history of struggle and high rate of intermarriage. Unfortunately Yugoslavia also has a large peasant class. Together with those who have been pushed to the margins of economic life and been lumpenised, they are all too ready to enlist in the militias and fight for "glory" (which is the irregulars name for rape, infanticide and theft). In the light of all this it makes little sense to talk of peace.

Intervention = Peace?

Faced with the naked barbarity of capitalism, it is understandable that some people take leave of their senses. They look for the source of peace in the most unlikely places. The wolf with the olive branch in its fangs is, in this case, the "international community", a trading name for international imperialism. Before we assess the qualifications of these peacemakers in blood-stained robes, we must look at their interests in both ex-Yugoslavia and in the wider world.

Germany and Italy, constituting a large part of the EC, and Austria all have direct interests in Croatia and Slovenia.[1] Their interests in the Balkans would be served by a victorious Croatia churning out value to be brought back to their heartlands, and by a defeated Serbia, unable to make trouble in Slovenia or Bosnia. The USA, on the other hand, fears the strengthening of its possible challengers on a world scale, especially Japan, and more relevantly in this case, a Germany at the heart of a strong EC. This is why the USA, through

its not-quite-reliable tool, the UN, imposed the "even-handed" arms embargo on the ex-Yugoslav countries. Like bourgeois "equality before the law" this embargo helped the "haves" (Serbia) against the "have nots" (Bosnia). Those who have no arms should be given no "more". The net result: the shrinking of a statelet to a city (Sarajevo). So far, so one-sided. We also need to look more closely at the relations between the imperialists and on two levels.

First, at the level of the EC. The EC states have achieved a degree of economic and industrial integration, both in terms of markets and of strategic planning. Even Britain, with its material links with the US has burnt its boats by adhering to European streamlining plans, e.g. UK steel products were sacrificed to relieve European overproduction. This makes sense only **within** the EC.

Moreover, looking to a future imperialist conflict, Germany cannot hope to win against the US unless it already has the resources of Europe behind it first. Nevertheless there is still competition between EC states, and it is this mixture of a need for cooperation and the existence of competition which explains why there was first resistance to Germany's recognition proposals for Croatia and Slovenia, why the EC then fell in with Germany's unilateral recognition and then why Germany did not intervene militarily despite its obvious wish to do so.

Second, on a world scale. Although Marxists believe that, without the intervention of the proletariat, a third world imperialist slaughter is inevitable, we also recognise that the blind economic forces leading to this slaughter, are mediated by the minds of human, albeit

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Continued from opposite page

Communism and Idealism

one factor alone (the crisis) was ever a condition for revolution (neither did the ICC). A moment's reflection shows this to be absurd since there have been a score of such moments of economic crisis in history which have not yielded revolution. Our view has always been that of Trotsky in his *History of the Russian Revolution* where he writes;

Entirely exceptional conditions, independent of the will of persons or parties, are necessary in order to tear off from discontent the fetters of conservatism, and bring the masses to insurrection.
op. cit p.18 (Pluto Press 1977 edn.)

The economic crisis also needs to be accompanied by a split in the ruling class and a class prepared both to fight beyond the narrow confines of the struggles over wages for a revolutionary opportunity to present itself.

So, in short we don't criticise the ICC as "idealist" because they don't understand historical materialism in theory but because in their actual practice they want to determine reality in their own heads. This how we think our actual perspective for the development of the crisis, rooted in material reality, enabled us to avoid the subjective fantasies of the ICC. We didn't have to theorise about a "left in opposition" (against a background in which left and right governments everywhere were forced to follow the same policies of cutting state spending). We did not dream up slogans about the 1980s being "the years of truth" nor did we seek consolation in the idea of the *subterranean maturation of consciousness*. Its fine by us if you want to talk about this subterranean anger of the proletariat unexpectedly bursting into insurrection like the *old mole* reaching the surface. But to talk of the *subterranean maturation of*

consciousness in these terms is nonsense. The proletariat can only make communism once it is conscious of its goal. Such a consciousness can only be formed in an open ideological struggle (of which this exchange is a part). Otherwise ideas cannot become "a material force" because they will not have gripped the masses. Class anger may suddenly and unexpectedly burst out in revolt but the forging or "maturing" of communist consciousness, by definition, only takes place under the gaze of the entire proletariat as an articulate political process. You cannot have an unconscious consciousness in a proletarian revolution. The revolution is the process which transforms the consciousness of the vanguard into the consciousness of the mass of the class at the same time as wiping out the vestiges of capitalist consciousness inevitably still present in the vanguard. Any other view is spontaneism.

The three examples of ICC theories given above are an attempt to demonstrate why our charge that the ICC is "idealist" is not a mere polemical insult. It is a deeply ingrained method which also explains some of their past splits. Today it is the real difference between us.

As to ourselves we do not say that subjective factors play no role in the working class movement (again it seems absurd even to suggest it to an organisation which has been fighting for a party). What we were arguing was that the debate between political minorities is a part of the class' struggle for liberation. This why we have to have a *regular intervention* as you put it. Purely paper positions which are not tested out in reality are mere abstractions which can mean nothing to the working class in general. That is why we have advocated raising revolutionary demands, factory groups, study groups etc as concrete schemes for the development of ways

and means of retaining, and developing, the sparks of consciousness thrown up by the episodic struggles of the class. These are as yet still to be tested in many cases. It seems that before we can go further we need to have an increase in the number of revolutionaries. This is why the CWO has created initiatives like this Open Space. If we can increase the contacts between communists, especially in Britain, we might be in a position to create a **real movement which would be stronger than the sum of its parts.** This is not a retreat into mindless movementism at the expense of political clarity.

We can't support your plea to take part in the EFICC's project to re-write platforms. That would be such an abstract paper exercise. Whatever modifications we think are necessary to our existing platform we don't accept that our essential positions have been undermined by recent history, although this might not be the same for those who shared the ICC's perspective of rising class struggle. As we have already said to the EFICC we cannot support their castles in the air project. We are more interested in learning how to turn our platform (suitably revised) into real political life through the formation of solid nuclei of workers wherever we have some real life in the working class of different countries.

Politically we are extremely pessimistic about these comrades. When they split from the ICC (leaving aside the organisational issue which has never been satisfactorily explained) they quickly degenerated because they not only continued to use the ICC's idealist methods to avoid looking at reality, but even carried them to new extremes (e.g. their insistence until almost August 1990 that "the USSR isn't collapsing"). Once, rather late in the day, they decided that the USSR had collapsed they then concluded somewhat ingenuously that not just they were wrong but everyone else. There is only one goal for their present trajectory and that is total confusion and demoralisation. We are, of course, ready to debate with them (to prevent them from succumbing to this fate) but we think we already have a method which broadly allows us to explain what is going on in the real world. The idea of discussing a new platform with the EFICC (which can't even decide whether it is an independent group or not) has got to be a joke.

More seriously you have a habit of making assumptions about us for which there is no

evidence. You quote from our Basic Positions to accuse us of seeing the next revolution as a mere re-run of 1917. This is unfair. What we say in our 23 line statement is that 1917 was the only time the proletariat took power. It shows that proletarian revolution is possible. It says no more than that. It doesn't say this is how revolution will be in the future because we don't know the circumstances in which the **proletariat will be fighting.** If you think we should map out such a blueprint then you are only underlining the utopian nature of your own political framework.

Lastly we don't approach the present situation as pessimistically as you do. We communists in Britain had no organisation which approximated to the present left communist groups 16 years ago. We have made many mistakes but we are beginning to learn from them. There are now better possibilities for dialogue and common work. The collapse of the USSR has had both negative and positive benefits but amongst those elements seeking a revolutionary coherence it has raised many questions. It has, above all, discredited those who claimed that Russia was a workers' state. This means that our analysis, whatever surprise we experienced at the manner of the USSR's collapse, has become more significant for real revolutionaries. Our task is now to produce as many publications addressing the whole issue of what is communism and how it can be achieved, and to distribute them as widely as possible to win them to us. This won't bring us an avalanche of new members but it should ensure a steady increase in the influence of the politics of the communist left. If we can reverse the notion that talking to leftists etc is *de facto* an opportunist policy we will make a bigger impact in the society where we exist today. We won't do it though by denying our origins as the FECCI want to. On the contrary we can be more than ever certain that those in the communist left who fought against social democracy, stalinism and trotskyism in the past did so on the only proletarian basis possible. Our task is to develop their ideas (yes!) and their practice for the epoch we live in.

Thanks for your contribution. We look forward to further exchanges.

Communist greetings

Jock (for the CWO)

Class Struggle not TUC Campaigns

sombre assessment nothing has happened to remove the shadow of that defeat. Only working class action can do it. Today though the miners have seen more than 120,000 jobs go in the pits since the end of the strike and they are either too demoralised or are waiting for others to be "the first to stick their heads out this time". British Coal job shop staff have been working hard to persuade miners to take the redundancy package before they faced more threats to their jobs. British Coal has put out a number of misleading figures about how many have taken redundancy in order to weaken miners' resolve but it is at least 3,500.

And this brings us to another grave consequence of 1984-5. The miners fought under the slogan "Coal not Dole". This confined the struggle to a miners' issue. By following this NUM slogan the miners isolated their struggle. In a sense they thought they could win alone. After all it was the miners who had closed Salford depot in 1974 and mass picketing had won then. But with huge stockpiles of coal and a prepared police force the Government was ready to wreak revenge. In 1981 Thatcher backed off a confrontation because there were indications that the miners would get support from other workers (particularly rail). None of these conditions existed in 1984. Such solidarity action as the other workers like the dockers and railworkers threatened was quickly stifled under the union leaders' diktat that there was to be no sympathy action.

The Role of the Unions

Everything we wrote about the TUC and the role of the unions in general in 1984-5 is equally valid today.

The experience of the last year of class struggle in Britain is a perfect illustration of the fact that generalisation cannot be achieved by trying to pressurise union leaders into "carrying out TUC resolutions". All we have seen from the TUC and its union barons have been a few crocodile tears at the plight of the miners whilst shady deals were patched up in smoke-filled rooms to do nothing. This is not simply a product of bureaucratic inertia. Unions are opposed to the collective interest of the working class. They exist to defend the small crumbs which capitalism allows this or that section of the working class and in fighting for a greater share of the capitalist cake for "their members" they fight against the rest of the working class.

After we had all watched Norman Willis and his pals singing "Jerusalem" in Hyde Park we have had nothing but demobilisations of class anger. The TUC refused to call a general strike and has also opposed Scargill's call for a "Day of Action" on January 19th. Apart from a few demonstrations in the mining areas, especially South Yorkshire, there has been little real action. The NUM-front, Women Against Pit Closures have demonstrated the reactionary stupidity of sectionalism by urging a consumer boycott of Yorkshire Electricity Board shops (the YEB is not even a power generating company!) instead of seeking solidarity with workers in the electricity industry who also face

redundancy. Add to this every failed campaign idea of the Labour movement of the last sixty plus years (marches from Scotland, petitions to MPs, High Court actions) and we have a lot of pseudo-activity which avoids the one response which is necessary - an all-out strike.

However the TUC would only call it if forced to do so by an unstoppable wave of class anger and it would only do so to derail the fight. At present the optimistic view that the pit review will make for a change in policy is focussing everyone's attention on the end of January.

Meanwhile the TUC has its own agenda. Having "stirred the conscience of the nation" whilst helping to stifle the consciousness of the class it has now stated that the main focus should be on "a plan for National Recovery". This yet another reactionary blind alley. At the bottom this Plan for National Recovery is really a plan to get a Labour Government elected. But if taken seriously it would be an attempt to stop imports, boost manufacturing industry by introducing selected subsidies and would mean breaking all the international trade agreements the British Government have signed. It would in the long run be a preparation for all out commercial war. The sort of war which have always been followed by shooting wars. A Plan for National Recovery would also, of course, demand productivity deals and wage freezes for us. The national interest is not our interest. We have no desire to get involved in the capitalist economic of whether pits are profitable or not (they will rig the statistics to suit themselves

anyway). If pits or any other production unit delivers something useful it will have a place under a socialist society. If capitalist society is ripping up industry and destroying the transport infrastructure on grounds of "profitability" this only underlines the necessity for its replacement by a rational system of production. But such a system has to be global. It cannot be based on narrow national interests.

How to Fight

Such a society won't be achieved overnight nor will it be achieved simply through argument. It will have to be fought for. This starts from resisting all forms of capitalist austerity. It means fighting against campaigns to "help the nation". It means organising our own struggles for our own goals without waiting for this or that union leader to tell us what to do. It means breaking out of the confines of the sectional struggle. It means taking over control of the struggle through mass assemblies of all workers (preferably not even in the one workplace). It means drawing everyone into the action. It also requires the election of strike committees which can be instantly re-called by the workers assemblies. Such struggles are the schools of working class organisation and consciousness. They have nothing in common with the political games of the unions. The objective situation is bad enough for 1993 to see the start of such types of struggles, provided that is, we can marry confidence to our anger.

Life of the Organisation

International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

Fifteen years of capitalist onslaught have left communist groups as tiny minorities compared to the tasks in front of us. Our resources are inadequate to fight the lies of the capitalists (both free market and state varieties).

We therefore appeal to all contacts, readers, sympathisers and subscribers to help in the struggle to give an authentic internationalist communist voice to the process of self-emancipation of the working class.

You can help by sending for bundles of leaflets or papers. The essence of political organisation is debate so you could also help by sending us letters (however critical), either about articles in previous issues or about your own experiences or ideas.

The continuation of capitalist rule depends on the passivity of the exploited class. Help us to break that cycle.

The Communist Workers' Organisation is the British affiliate of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party. The IBRP is not the Party but a focus of discussion and organisation towards such a goal. This is further explained in the Platform and Statutes of the Bureau. These are now available in English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Bengali and Farsi.

The Bureau publishes a central organ in English, **COMMUNIST REVIEW** as well as **Revue Communiste** in French (write to CWO), **Internationalist Notes** in Farsi and **Prometeo** and **Battaglia Comunista** in Italian. We also have publications in Bengali. Please write to the appropriate address below (PCInt for **Internationalist Notes**)

**Il Partito Comunista
Internazionalista,
CP 1753, 20101 Milano, Italy.**

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**CWO
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Internationalist Communist Review

From January 1993 Communist Review will be called Internationalist Communist Review as we have discovered that another publication already exists with the original title.

No. 11 is now out and includes articles on:

**The War in Ex-Yugoslavia
Trotskyism and the Collapse of the USSR
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Price £1.50 from our address or in the bookshops mentioned on p.3

Public Meeting

of groups of the Communist Left

Supported by the Communist Workers' Organisation, Communist Bulletin Group and the External Fraction of the ICC.

How can the Working Class Fight the Attacks of Crisis-ridden Capitalism?

2.30 p.m.

Saturday January 30th

The Wheatsheaf

(behind Gullivers, Oldham St)

Manchester

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!