

TIMEX: Class Struggle is Still Alive

On June 19th over 5000 people rallied and marched through Dundee in support of the sacked workers of Timex, the multinational electronics company. When 70,000 were working in the jute mills, Dundee had the highest proportion of industrial workers in any city in Britain with a tradition of militancy corresponding to its numbers. The June march, latest event in a five month battle, while being a faint echo of a buried past is, more importantly, a harbinger of things to come.

The workers' fight at Timex is as important for what it is as for what it represents: a focal point of struggle, a beacon of hope for workers throughout the country in the bleakest period for our class since the end of the War. For both bourgeoisie and proletariat, the brave stand of the Timex workers has one clear message: the working class and its struggle are still alive and can only be kept in abeyance temporarily.

Timex under siege

The threat of closure by Xmas is the latest brutal tactic by Timex bosses, whose whole strategy in provoking the strike was to enforce slave labour, Third World conditions. Twenty weeks of struggle, of refusal to be browbeaten into submission, has pushed the company with its back against the wall. Production by the scab workforce having all but collapsed, the threat of closure must be seen as a last desperate effort by the bosses, all else having failed. They imagined this, coupled with vague talk of improved redundancy terms and low paid jobs for 150 strikers would end the dispute. Olsen, the millionaire owner and his subalterns, desperately want to clear the gates of pickets, blackmail some of the trained workforce back and grab as much profit this year as they can, in a booming electronics market. In this they have failed miserably.

him the same "generous" redundancy package as the rest of the Timex workforce) shows that the bosses are running out of ideas in the fight against the workers.

Rôle of the Unions

However, management are not the only hindrance to the spreading of the struggle. Since day one, despite paying lip service to the support of the strike, the unions have in practice been the most firm obstacle to the extending it. On the very first mass meeting of the first day, the AEEU were able to transform the spontaneous anger against layoffs into a fight for the rotation of layoffs. They made it quite clear that the demands of the market place were to take precedence over the needs of the workers. The AEEU have condemned "illegal mass pickets" and threatened the Timex workers with expulsion from the union and loss of the pittance of strike pay — that had to be forced out of them in the first place — if their actions were not "wholly within the civil and criminal law". Scottish TUC boss Campbell Christie condemned the successful mass picket of 22nd March and STUC "support" for such actions as 19th June was to ensure that the struggle was contained within boundaries that in no way threatened the requirements of capital. The main achievement of the STUC has been to do deals with the police to organise marches to lead workers away from mass pickets to avoid any "serious trouble". And to cap it all, on July 1st their "day of (pretended) action" does not involve a mass picket, but, instead, token one hour stoppages of the kind which in the past have demobilised rather than mobilised, and have often taken place in the lunch hour!

Laird is calling the closure an "avoidable tragedy" whilst the union is preparing to cooperate with management in an "orderly run-down" of the factory. As in so many other plants, the union is revealing itself for what it is, not an instrument capable of defending even the minimum material interests of the workers, but an indispensable arm of management in the foisting of slave labour conditions on the backs of its members. Time and time again the unions have come up with attacks on their members disguised as a "victory for common sense", "voluntary redundancies", pay-cuts, total closures, all in the name of "realism".

But the reality is that the capitalist system the unions are busily engaged in defending is in the throes of a deep and irresolvable crisis, and the longer workers keep accepting that they have to pay for this crisis, the more attacks we will have to face. It is no use appealing to the union bosses or the Labour Party to act in support of the Timex struggle as leftist groups like the Socialist Workers Part advocate. We have to relearn the elementary lesson that any effective fightback can only

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The US Bombing of Baghdad

The Shape of Things to Come

The eight Baghdad citizens killed by US cruise missiles on June 27th had not all been buried before the Western press had lost interest in the affair. After all, it is business as usual for US imperialism. As the *Daily Mail* could blandly state "When in doubt bomb Baghdad". However these Tory scions have an ulterior motive since they wish to portray the Clinton regime as incompetent compared with Maggie Thatcher's old pals in the White House, Reagan and Bush.

Certainly no-one can be in any doubt that Clinton acted to bolster his image at home rather than from any real threat to the US abroad. His own speeches in which he stated that it "felt good" (shame about the deaths of the civilians, which included three children), since it would tell the world "Don't tread on us" give the game away. The feeble justifications he has citing Article 51 of the UN Charter (which clearly states that each nation has the right to defend itself from invasion) as well as using the supposed confession of two of the fourteen Kuwaitis and Iraqis accused of plotting to blow up George Bush last April cannot hide that this was simply a demonstration of naked military might. Even if the plot was true the US Government has nothing to learn on this score from Iraq. It has already

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Workers need active solidarity in struggle, not just solidarity on demonstrations. The best support for Timex, for the firefighters, is to carry forward our own struggles and unite them.

This is the most better dispute to erupt since the 1980's, symbol of a mass discontent simmering not very far from the surface. After years of defeats, of ever lower wages, ever faster speed-ups and ever increasing layoffs, after a period where the ruling class thought that the word "strike" had virtually disappeared from the English language, a handful of workers prepared to make a solid stand against the general onslaught, have proved them wrong. The "slash and burn" multinational has failed to break the struggle and solidarity of 343 courageous strikers. Mass layoffs, lock-outs, 10% pay cuts, then 27% cuts, and now the threat of closure have all failed to divide and conquer. Timex workers have shown that even in today's situation of mass unemployment, enough is enough.

If Timex plan to close down, why wait until Xmas? And why advertise for more scab labour the day after announcing closure? In short, their mercenary scabs can't do the job and they need the strikers' skills to produce for current orders and avoid penalty clauses. They are desperate to get trained workers back in — with £30 wage cuts! — to meet an estimated £25 million in sales over the next six months.

Timex claim they have to close because they've lost £10mn in 5 years. This is a lie. Timex has sweated millions of pounds out of Dundee workers for over 50 years. They could afford £1mn investment at the end of last year. Multinational bosses fiddle the accounts to show "losses" in one country when it suits their plans to exploit cheaper labour in another. But the departure of Peter Hall (we trust Timex offers

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Corruption and Crisis

The Nadir of Western Democracy?

Why, after the so-called conviction politics of the 1980s, do all the governments and government systems of the capitalist centres appear to be weak, saddled with corruption and without a clue?

Last September the British Government wasted something over £10 billions trying to prop up sterling. It failed miserably and the pound fell out of the ERM. Until that "Black Wednesday" we were told that membership of the ERM was essential to control inflation. After the collapse of sterling we were told that it didn't matter after all. The same politicians who led the British economy into the European Monetary System now told us that this disaster was actually a victory. It is little wonder that the bosses papers now refer to John Major as "the blunderer". At the same time the level of corruption amongst the ruling class has never been so exposed. The Maxwell episode showed that the Tories were not the only party to benefit from massive fraud. However the revelations about Tory ministers trying to get the fraudster Asil Nadir let off in return for his "generous support" of the Tory election campaign, unleashed a stream of exposures of funding for Britain's ruling party from all kinds of gangsters from Hong Kong to the Gulf states.

But the stench of corruption and clueless blundering are not just confined to ruling class politics in Britain. In Italy ex-Prime Ministers are under investigation and in disgrace for taking bribes and being the political godfathers of the Mafia. In France the ex-Prime Minister Berégovoy shot himself, not for leading the Socialists to a massive defeat in the elections but for accusations of corruption. The same scandals also hit the Spanish Socialist Party of Felipe Gonzalez. In the USA the Clinton message that

he brought "hope" has quickly vanished. We stated at his election that he had nothing to offer the 10% of the US population who eke out Third World existences. What was less predictable was the fact that the US press would quickly pounce on his obvious inability to carry out his vague promises. After all capitalist politicians have been doing this regularly since the introduction of the ballot box. So why is there a desire by the ruling class to wash its dirty linen in public at the present time?

Crisis becoming Catastrophe

There are three factors involved in the present public anguish at the political scene in the world's most dominant countries. The first is that the capitalists have no solution to the crisis that they have created. For twenty years the world capitalist system has been in a long depression. As we have written many times it is the longest depression that capitalism has had since the Great Depression of 1873 to 1896. Like the present one it was punctuated by mini-booms which promised recovery. The difference was that the Great Depression ended, after a series of bankruptcies and takeovers in a new centralisation and concentration of capital. Today we are in a different situation. Today we are in the era of capitalist imperialism when the process of centralisation and concentration has gone so far that a new round of accumulation can only begin on the basis of the destruction of capital values. This is primarily achieved through war. This also explains why the era of imperialism

is also the era of global wars of a destructive quality never seen before in history. Capitalism today is a cycle of boom — slump — war — recovery — slump. After two world wars this century a third cycle of accumulation began in 1945. It started with a post-war boom which only came to an end in the early 1970s. The chief signal for this was the devaluation of the US dollar since this led to the collapse of the world economic system set up at the end of the Second World War. We are therefore now at the end of this third cycle of capitalist accumulation. What the capitalists have done over the last twenty years is carry out a series of different policies designed to postpone the effects of the crisis. They have not solved it. In fact their various stunts have only created the present impasse. The chief features of this are mountains of debt which has hit nearly every state from the USA (approaching \$3 trillion) to the poorest African country, and global unemployment which is both massive and, in normal peacetime conditions, insoluble. None of this is a surprise to Marxists. The accumulation of capital demands a reserve army of labour which capital can draw on in good times and ditch during slumps. Even a bourgeois scribbler was recently forced to admit that

...the current spectre haunting Europe is that Marx has finally been proven right ...It seems that capitalism does require a reserve army of the unemployed — British trends suggest unemployment could touch 5 millions within 20 years — to which the market solution is wage cuts and impoverishment.
Will Hutton, *The Guardian* 22.6.93

The truth is that the ruling class everywhere has no solutions. Even previous "economic miracles" like Germany and Japan have become fallible. Once again this is reflected in the crisis of the political system. The corruption scandals that have rocked the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party have until now been accepted as

normal. Today however even the younger LDP deputies are voting against their previous godfathers to such an extent that the Japanese Prime Minister was humiliated in a Parliamentary vote of no-confidence and forced to resign.

Now the cry has gone up that everywhere in the Western world (but particularly in the Anglo-Saxon countries including Canada and Australia where PMs Mulroney and Hawke were unceremoniously dumped by their parties) there is a "crisis of leadership". In Britain the Tory faithful cry to bring back Thatcher whilst in the USA there is much nostalgia for the Reagan years. But the nature of the present crisis means that whoever is in power has nowhere to go. The complete lack of programmes to deal with the crisis is a feature of all the capitalist parties. This lack of a real alternative explains why even a bankrupt and corrupt regime like that of Felipe Gonzalez, just like the Tories in Britain, could scrape back in. In the past the capitalists always believed they had a solution to the crisis. At first they thought that by throwing money at it they could spend their way out of recession. But deficit financing and printing money only led to hyperinflation. Then it was the turn of the watered-down monetarists who followed the Chicago gangster Milton Friedman. In Britain they were represented by the Thatcher regime. The Thatcher years gave the illusion of strong leadership because the Tories had a programme. This was to privatise the economy, restructure (at minimal state expense) the national economy and deregulate the financial sector to make Britain the new offshore investment paradise for the world's finance capitalists. They also discovered they could use the legacy of mass unemployment left by Labour to drive down wages. The results? A fitting monument to debt and bankruptcy at Canary Wharf which remains largely unoccupied; and permanent mass unemployment which threatens to bankrupt a government which is borrowing a billion a week to meet its spending requirements.

US Bombing of Baghdad

The Shape of Things to Come

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killed several foreign leaders (e.g. Allende) and overthrown scores more this century already. It should not be forgotten that last January Security Adviser Brent Skowcroft announced that the CIA has a covert operation to overthrow Saddam Hussein. International terrorism is obviously a relative concept.

We can forget all the finer legal arguments (the trial of the Kuwait fourteen still goes on). We can also forget all the sad shaking of the head by the Labour Party and its leftist supporters. They thought that Clinton was a model for "change" (i.e. whose ideas might get Labour in to power) but he turns out to be no different from Bush. As every internationalist could have told them this comes as no surprise. The ruling class is, after all, the ruling class, whatever party the chief gangster comes from. The continuity of US imperialist strategy is not decided by the figurehead who is President. It is formed by the permanent officials and political pressure groups who speak for the great financial and industrial monopolies and in whose interests they stalk the corridors of power in Washington.

US Imperialism Since 1945

However in a changing world it is hard to maintain a consistent policy. This has been the problem of US imperialism since the Cold War ended. Although the US won the Cold War it did not finish as absolute victor. In fact it was certainly more dominant in global terms in 1945 than it is today. Then it was easily the richest state in the world with no war damage to speak of and very few casualties in relation to its population size. Europe and Japan were devastated and the

USSR was a military power which presided over a virtual economic desert. Britain, which had fought Hitler to preserve its Empire, was in so much debt to the USA that in a decade it had to abandon it under pressure from the US. France soon followed having pulled out of Vietnam in 1953 and Algeria in 1962. The age of colonialism was dead but imperialism was not. We were now truly in the age of domination of finance capital. Attempts by some local bourgeois leaders to escape the control of US imperialism drove them into the arms of the USSR. Countries like Vietnam chose to drive out US puppet regimes with USSR arms and aid. They even played upon the "anti-imperialist" nature of the struggle to win support amongst the Left in Europe and elsewhere (as if they could have struggled for a single day without the support of the other imperialist power). However, Vietnam coincided with the end of the post-war boom. The US found itself no longer to pay for a war without end. It was a profound shock to the US ruling class to discover that their economic resources could not prevent the first serious albeit distant defeat in that country's history.

After Vietnam the main aim of the US was to win a ferocious arms race against the USSR. This it did but the cost has been debt in the order of \$3 trillions. This means that US imperialism has to seek a foreign policy which will allow it to force other states to follow its directives whilst at the same time spend as little as possible on any action. Hence it forced its former allies in NATO, SEATO etc. to pay up sums of money to support the US effort in the Gulf War whilst it has since sought to carry out actions which have the maximum of impact with the minimum of

cost. It also tried (without success) in the G7 summit last April to get the Japanese to pay up for the restructuring of the economies of the ex-USSR. Again this was a task that the US in 1945 was capable of doing for itself. As we say in our article on the UN it wants and needs "imperialism on the cheap". Certainly the capitalists don't talk anymore of a new world order, except perhaps to mourn that it never happened. Some still believe that it will come into existence once all the legacies of the Cold War are over. This is of course to ignore the fact that out of the old rivalries will come new ones. As we wrote even before the Gulf War began

The world may seem to be more formless since the collapse of the Soviet rivalry to the USA but the present chaos seems to be drifting towards a new and unstable division of the world. The previous two imperialist wars this century were preceded by trade wars. Those who talk of "the end of history" should perhaps watch how quickly it can accelerate, especially under the new world disorder.

(Workers Voice 55)

Today the US is trying might and main to make its old allies pay more for the crisis through in the Uruguay round of the GATT talks. In these the demands of the US get more strident and hypocritical with every passing day. The Europeans and the Japanese both need the US market and have tried to make concessions which the US has denounced as inadequate. Under the Cold War the US was prepared to cooperate. Today a debt-ridden US with unemployment rising despite the fact that 10% of the population "enjoy" third world living standards is less tractable. It is all part of the shape of imperialist rivalry in the period ahead.

Campaigns against Corruption are Diversions

After twenty years of fiddling the accounts and restructuring economic statistics as well as desperately trying to find ways to increase the turnover of capital the capitalist class have achieved only a postponement of the day of reckoning. The crisis has not gone away. Writing about the Copenhagen summit of the EC bosses and noting that even the EC itself predicts unemployment in excess of 20 millions by the end of the year, John Carvel commented

There is little that heads of government can do collectively to accelerate recovery. They do not believe they can use public finances to spend their way out of recession because their budget deficits are so large. Increasing them would cause higher interest rates and exchange rate turmoil, choking the stimulus they were trying to engineer.

Guardian 19.6.93

Or put another way the ruling class has no credible solution left. This is why we have the massive diversion of campaigns against corruption. In Italy in particular the citizens have been given the most massive dose of illusion politics (See the article on corruption in Italy in *Workers' Voice* 66). By hammering at corruption, changing the voting system and promoting new parties the Italian ruling class hope to divert attention from the problems of the capitalist system itself. But as they say in France "the more it changes, the more it stays the same". Today the ex-Italian Communist Party (now hiding behind an oak tree instead of brandishing the hammer and sickle), or, as it is now, the Party of the Democratic Left are in alliance with all kinds of business parties (including that of the big bosses). It has thus risen to its historic task and come to the defence of Italian capitalism. But it too has no programme of any description. And this returns us to the main issue. The capitalists everywhere have no solution.

Paradoxically though the present comic opera in which new allegations of corruption are made

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The Nadir of Western Democracy?

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in every country's press shows that the ruling class does not feel under threat.

The Capitalist Alibi

In the first place the collapse of the Soviet Union has removed a military menace (at least in the short term) which disciplined the Western states into accepting US leadership without question. Today the cracks are beginning to appear. Whereas it was automatic for the Western alliance to rally around the US in the Cold War today each nation is beginning to seek its own independent salvation. This is the reason for all the haggling over a new GATT deal and why most of the main European countries are distinctly uncomfortable about US policies in Bosnia and Iraq. The old certainties of the Cold War have been replaced by hesitant policies as every state re-evaluates what is in its best interests in the present period of crisis and realignment. This hesitation is another source of obvious weakness of the West.

The Working Class Lives!

This brings us to the third factor — the retreat of the working class in the last decade. Although the ruling class in every country appears to be divided and squabbling the one certain factor to unite them would be the threat of a major working class upheaval. Its absence and the fact that the workers have taken all the attacks of the last ten years relatively mildly further explains why the bosses are now beginning to wash their dirty linen in public. However such an exercise is fraught with danger. As Trotsky once noted the three factors necessary for a successful revolutionary fight are

1. An economic crisis which hits the living standards of the working class.
2. A serious split in the ruling class and
3. A combative and conscious working class regrouped around a revolutionary party.

Under present conditions only the third factor is missing. After years of retreat however the signs are that the working class is coming to the end of its tether. There is a new willingness to fight even in the most hopeless of struggles. At the moment resistance is piecemeal and largely sectional but this could also be the platform for a new and more general resistance. Communists have to prepare for this by fighting for a revolutionary consciousness within each of these struggles. It is the task of every communist in the period ahead to focus attention on the real enemy, the capitalist system and not be side-tracked by false campaigns from Labour and the leftists to restructure and cleanse its state. Corruption and incompetence are only the outward faces of the mortal crisis of the system. Our consciousness and our self-organisation can finish it off.

SOMALIA:

UN Death Squads in Mogadishu

When the US marines went into Somalia last December, Western propaganda claimed that this was a move to disarm the warring factions and promote peace in this desperate part of the world. Yet the so called "Operation Restore Hope" was at best a last ditch publicity stunt by outgoing President Bush. It also had the more serious function to warn the whole world that America has the capacity to strike anywhere. Just like the recent bombing of Baghdad, the unambiguous message is that you don't mess with the US. The hypocrisy of Western intervention is only too evident as just like Bosnia, Iraq and a dozen other places, the crisis in Somalia is a direct product of imperialism. During the Cold War Somalia received substantial funds and arms. Originally these came from the USSR but when the latter started supporting the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia, the Siad Barre regime in Mogadishu turned to the US. When the Cold War ended, the West no longer had any direct interest in Somalia and withdrew economic support. It is no surprise that the start of the Somali civil war in 1989 corresponded to the end of the Cold War. Siad Barre's regime collapsed and was succeeded by warlordism as rival factions of the Somali ruling class began to fight over meagre resources. The only things imperialism left them with in plenty were weapons. The economic situation was made worse by famine which was itself largely caused by the substitution of capitalist cash crop farming which deprived substantial sections of the peasantry of their previous means of subsistence. With agriculture in ruins the country became wholly dependent on food aid and the aid shipments a highly prized commodity for the local ruling class gangsters. We now see the sickening irony of the imperialist policies which have devastated Somalia, appearing to come to its rescue. But in the twisted world of capitalist

ideology appearances are usually false and belie a more sordid reality. The US and subsequent UN armies in Somalia have behaved just like an army of occupation, suppressing and massacring the local population as evidenced by the recent shooting of civilians demonstrating against the UN presence. In short the population of Mogadishu are almost as likely to be murdered by UN troops as they are the local ruling class bandits. Such is the nature of "peace keeping in the New World Order". This shows that the UN is merely an extension of US interests. However that is not all. What is happening in Somalia is part of a more general pattern.

The Pakistani soldiers shot by Aideed's troops had no armoured vehicles unlike their British counterparts in Bosnia. The UN is chronically short of funds because the US and today also the USSR refuse to pay their dues. Troops of the Ukrainian contingent in Bosnia have been so broke because their state has not passed on their UN pay that they have been selling their weapons for food. The same is features can be seen in Cambodia where Bulgarians have been the main victims of the Khmer Rouge attacks. Contrast this with situations where the US can cut a bit of dash at the same time as carrying out policies much more central to its imperialist interests such as blitzing Baghdad. In places like Bosnia where the problems are more difficult to solve and where the US main interest is to stop the rise of a German bloc it is much cheaper for the USA to use the often badly trained and equipped UN forces rather than its own army. This is not an insignificant factor given Clinton's preoccupation with reducing the enormous American budget deficit. This is imperialism in crisis, imperialism on the cheap. Contrary to the banal fantasies of Western propaganda, the current regional conflicts we are now seeing are caused

by "evil individuals" such as Saddam Hussein or General Aideed in Somalia, but are the result of factions of the ruling class desperate to hold onto their wealth and power in the face of economic collapse. In Somalia the UN is increasingly becoming just one more murderous faction representing American and Western interests. (This also explains the absence of a significant UN intervention in Bosnia as the West is divided over who to support).

The calls of the liberal pundits for United Nations free from Western domination is nothing but utopian nonsense. An institution created by imperialism is not going to challenge imperialist interests. Workers should not be deluded into expecting the UN to intervene in a neutral manner to protect them from the growing barbarism that characterises capitalism in its present phase. What we are seeing is the beginning of the break up of real concerted UN action. Though the West is united in Somalia it is not elsewhere, and the UN will increasingly become a diplomatic arena for manoeuvring as the crisis drives the old alliances apart. In the meantime each power only supports those actions which it believes can gain it something in the competitive arena of international imperialism. The only real force for peace is the international working class. Enfeebled and disorganised as it is at present it alone through its position as the producing class has the power to stop capitalism driving the world forward to barbarism. And this can't be done by speeches or leaflets but by united actions, including strikes and demonstrations. The only real insurance against imperialist war is however a world revolution. It is with this perspective that the CWO joined the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party and it is this perspective that we take into the struggles of the working class wherever we can.

PBD

From the Picket Line

Pickets, Violence and the State

So long as capitalism continues so will class struggle. Class conscious workers recognise that and so do the bosses. When workers start to fight they have to throw off their normal ideological shackles and organise strikes, pickets, occupations, demonstrations, leafletting, defence squads, 'hit squads' and whatever other weapons of class struggle are available.

Lined up against the workers is the whole armoury which the ruling class keeps on permanent stand-by. This armoury of bourgeois class struggle is the state machine. Every day the ruling class prepares for class struggle not just through its visible Parliamentary law-making but also through the machinations of the military, the police, the secret service, the intelligence gathering by the Civil Service and Local Authorities etc. etc.

Those workers who attended the Timex or Middlebrook mass pickets witnessed the reality of the state's claim to a monopoly of legal violence. It was no surprise that the police used the usual combination of direct and well-trained physical force backed up by the full legal apparatus to ensure that scabs would be able to enter the factory.

Workers who want to exercise our class power on the picket line, of course, feel frustrated as the bosses' police attack our pickets arresting as they see fit. It is time some basic lessons were re-learned.

Fighting back

When the police attack our pickets we must learn to resist. Linking arms and packing ourselves tightly will provide some resistance to the flying wedge and the snatch squads. Individual workers should avoid where possible any confrontation with cops on picket lines.

As the heat of the class struggle increases the need to defend pickets and other working-class actions will increase. Workers will learn whether ball-bearings or pepper is the best defence against Police horses. The cop's flying wedges will be beaten back with correct organisation and sufficient determination.

At Timex there was no consistent application of any such basic defence of the pickets. That is a reflection of the generally low level of class awareness coupled with the absence of any significant revolutionary current within the class.

We are many, they are few

For the time being the cops will attack our pickets with relative impunity but our class will not be subservient for ever. Long before a genuinely

revolutionary situation arises we will resist the state attacks with the self-organisation and self-activity of our class. Even then, such struggles may ebb and flow within the capitalist system.

The most advanced workers will continue to learn the lessons, both positive and negative of every moment in the class struggle. Those lessons will be continually discussed and refined until the class itself is consciously armed with all that is necessary to overthrow the bosses and their state in all its guises.

A duty of Internationalist Communists is to help develop our class's awareness which will prepare the move from today's impotence to tomorrow's classless and oppression-free future.

KT



Saltley Gates 1974: As the class struggle steps up, mass picketting will not, in itself, be enough to defeat the bosses. Mass solidarity action is the only way to defeat the state.

Revolutionaries and the Unions

Introduction

The following article is the text of a speech a comrade from the CWO gave to a meeting of the Sheffield Revolutionary Study Circle. This is a circle of workers and unemployed which some of our comrades participate alongside members of other revolutionary tendencies. The speech was part of a debate with Dave Douglass of Class War, a full-time miner and a NUM delegate at Hatfield Main. It would be pleasant if we could record a meeting of minds but there was not. What it showed is that many in the anarchist or syndicalist milieu have never heard of the positions of the Communist Left. As a result their weary arguments against Trotskyists' manipulative practices made little impact. We also found that instead of addressing our arguments they resorted to ouvrierist demagoguery and shouting comrades down. This has only convinced us that we have a job to do to make the positions of the Communist Left more widely known. We hope this text will give pause for thought to those anarchists who attended the debate and we invite responses from any reader.

Tonight I am speaking for the Communist Workers Organisation which is the British affiliate to an internationalist organisation called the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party. This is not an insignificant declaration since it is within this framework that I will be arguing about the nature of unions and the nature of revolution.

The Origins of Unions and the Formation of the working class

Unions have never been revolutionary. At the dawn of capitalism (and even today in the countries on the periphery of capitalism) it sometimes seems as though they might be. However the brutality with which primitive capitalist set-ups attacks the first attempts by workers to organise themselves against capitalism shouldn't be allowed to hide the fact that unions are perfectly compatible with capitalism and that today they represent one of the best means for the capitalists to keep the workers struggles in check.

We know that historically the capitalists attacked the first attempts as "combination" by the workers (the first combination act banning unions was in the 1720s in Britain, the French equivalent which emerged during the French Revolution was the Loi Le Chapelier of 1790). We know too that the unions in Britain were formally legalised after the quasi-insurrections following the Napoleonic Wars although the ruling class message didn't reach the magistrates in Dorchester by the 1830s when they sentenced the Tolpuddle Martyrs for taking illegal oaths. The unions have lived on this episode ever since.

The First International

Marx in the 1850s and 1860s saw the unions as "schools of socialism" especially as they seemed about the only means by which the working class could organise independently of all capitalist parties. And this I think is a central point in our revolutionary statements today. The history of the working class is the struggle to break free from bourgeois domination, to find ways of organising which didn't depend on some ruling class party like the Liberals. This is also why union leaders like Odger and Cremer were

originally seen as important by Marx in the founding of the IWMA in 1864. The fact that they only joined the First International to stop strike breaking labour being brought in from France or that Napoleon III, Emperor of the French had paid for the French trades unions to attend the first meeting didn't deter Marx from taking part in what he saw as a step forward in the real movement in the working class. It also represented a step forward in his thinking too. First, for the Rules of the International Working Mens' Association, he wrote the famous line that

The emancipation of the working class is the task of the workers themselves

by which he meant that the workers needed their own independent political party and the First International was just that.

Second he began to realise that there were indeed limitations to the vision of trades unionists especially the New Model trades unionists of the labour aristocracy he was associated with then. In fact Cremer and Odger both broke with him and Cremer became a Liberal MP. Marx began to take issue with those who represented one or other form of bourgeois ideology inside the working class. One of these was a British "theoretician" called Weston. He argued that it was useless workers pursuing higher wage claims because the capitalists just passed it back in higher prices. Such thoughts have been echoed by many a twentieth century union leader at various times (especially when a Labour Government has been in power). Marx took up the intellectual cudgels to wipe out this basically capitalist message. In his concluding reply in Wages, Prices and Profits he stated that it was now time for the working class to go beyond the trades union slogan of a fair day's pay for a fair day's work and instead inscribe upon its banners the revolutionary watchword "abolition of the wages system".

Social Democracy and Trades Unionism

However this message was still ahead of its time. Marxist revolutionaries on the continent now took the lead in extending unions beyond the skilled working class to include all workers. This brought millions of workers into contact with social democratic politics in the late nineteenth century. But social democracy was an ambiguous movement. It contained both revolutionaries, like Luxemburg and Lenin and what were thought to be reformists, like David, Legien and Noske in Germany. Many thought though that when it came to the crunch social democracy would become revolutionary. Many who doubted it actually joined in syndicalist organisations particularly in France, Spain and Italy.

But capitalism was changing. By the beginning of this century the concentration of capital had reached such heights that capitalist competition had transferred to an international level. We call this the era of imperialism. Capitalist crises could no longer be solved by mere slumps but only through imperialist war. This was obvious to revolutionaries at the time and they forced the Second International to pass resolutions that in the event of war every national section would call for a general strike and resistance.

In the event they did the opposite. Syndicalists and Social democrats alike soon showed what side they were on in the class war. Whilst social democratic parties voted for war funds for their governments, trades unions of all types entered into a "union sacrée", a holy alliance with their own capitalist governments. Not only did they promise no strikes throughout the war, they accepted dilution so that wages fell, and they helped organise conscription. This was a real turning point in the class struggle.

Trades Unions and the Russian Revolution

And it was no mistake or aberration. The First World War was eventually brought to a halt by working class insurrection and revolution. Strikes, riots and mutinies in Britain, France, Germany and Italy were superseded by the two revolutions in Russia in 1917. This started the

greatest international revolutionary wave in the history of the working class.

And what role did the unions play in all this? Well in the Russian revolution they were for the most part swept aside because the workers expressed themselves through different, revolutionary organisations such as the factory committees, the militias and above all the soviets. The latter arose from a need to unite strikes beyond single industries in the 1905 revolution and in 1917 they re-emerged as the form of workers revolutionary government. The only role that unions played as unions was to call for strikes against the soviets after October 1917 (e.g. the bank workers and the railway workers union which was led by Mensheviks).

But if there role in Russia was undistinguished it was downright reactionary in Germany. It was the union leader Noske who conspired with the crypto-fascist Freikorps to massacre the revolutionary workers. It was the German trades unionists who prevented Rosa Luxemburg from addressing a workers council in 1918 because she was in Gavin Laird's words "an outsider". No doubt similar thoughts went through the minds of Thomas and Co. when the Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin told them in 1926 that they alone had the power to save the British Constitution or else it was those outside No. 10 who would rule the country. But we can talk about the General Strike later.

From this time henceforth there has been little pretence that the unions have been anything but bastions of the capitalist order organised inside the working class. They defended the imperialist war in 1939 and have become more and more integrated into the apparatus of the ruling class. In times of class quiet (as now) they can often get away with appearing outside the system but as soon as there is any level of class struggle which rocks the boat they suddenly resume their pivotal position in sabotaging the struggle.

Unions today

Lets have a look at some traditional arguments about unions.

1. The unions are OK but the leaders are bad. A funny argument since there have never been good leaders. The point is that the unions are neither the representatives of the rank and file nor neutral organisations. They represent the capitalist structure for integrating the militant into the daily grind of negotiating wage rates and redundancies. How many workers have elected a really militant comrade to represent them only to find that bit by bit they have become a union hack that begins to speak a different language. Soon they are on the greasy pole to the top. This doesn't happen in isolated cases. This is the norm.

2. Create Red, revolutionary or otherwise trades unions. Another nonsense. A permanent mass organisation of workers cannot exist without entering into negotiations with the bosses and in this period, negotiations are not about improvements but about the conditions of our surrender. Permanent organisations will come into existence where unions are missing because the capitalists need them but let us not kid ourselves that these can be any more working class than the existing organisations. In this period there is nothing to negotiate - our need is to unite and extend the struggles everywhere if we are to reverse the increasing misery of the working class.

3. Unification and extension of strikes and other struggles. Today this is the fundamental need. Workers can be picked off section by section. Unions aren't neutral in this. They positively fight against it. The examples are legion. Dave Douglass' own pamphlet "Refracted Perspective" talks of the dockworkers at Immingham during the 1984-5 strike as "spineless bastards". This may have some truth in it but in one who refuses to criticise his own union this is also the language of sectionalism. What about the stupid bastards in the NUM who accepted the slogan "Coal not Dole" A slogan which condemned the miners to isolation. After all, if the struggle was

just about coal then why should other workers join in? This is what we mean by sectionalism. The examples are legion. Bill Sirs the ISTC leader who refused to give solidarity to the miners in 1984 despite their support for the steelworkers in 1980 and the way in which the AUEE have sought to isolate Timex are just two.

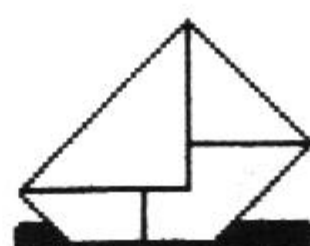
4. The nature of the struggle is also important. Underground workers in 1989 actually won their demands. How? By having a strike committee that was recallable, mass meetings open to all, greater involvement of everyone, and active solidarity with BR workers. Today unions are hostile to this. The bureaucracy plays on the legal situation (and its amazing how many workers actually believe that this is a barrier to action) but when the chips are really down there has never been a successful legal struggle in Britain. By now the message should be clear - real class struggle recognises neither union nor legal restraints. Again unions are not neutral on this. At the Doncaster meeting in February discussed in Workers Voice 65 proposals to form a strike committee across South Yorkshire independently put by CWO members and members of the Doncaster Solidarity Group (which Dave supports) was attacked by the only union full-timer present as a proposal for revolution! We wish it had been! It is just another example of the unions acting as policemen inside the working class struggle.

5. Last of all but perhaps it should have been first of all the revolution has to be international. The histories of the Paris Commune and the October Revolution show that the revolution cannot be confined to overthrowing one set of capitalists within a national area. Until we have paralysed imperialism by our strikes, our demonstrations, and our sabotage we will never be in a position for the extension of world revolution. But what of the unions? Well we have already spoken about their support for the capitalist in imperialist war but this is only the logical culmination of their everyday policies. Their sectionalism is more rabid when faced with foreign workers! They are the first to campaign for protectionism, for national economic recovery (and in the 1970s when Labour was in power), for austerity. They will be the allies of the capitalist state when the situation is at its most desperate. This is why we cannot simply ignore their existence.

Conclusion

We haven't the time to develop all the necessary arguments suggested here - the discussion will do that. The final question is - how do revolutionaries relate to the unions given that 8 million workers are still in them? First of all we remain rank and file members. This gives us the opportunity to argue against all the horrendous aspects of unions in any forum which presents itself. We argue for everyone irrespective of union affiliation to be in the struggle and for elected, recallable and controllable strike committees. We accept no elected post except under 2 conditions a) it is an ongoing struggle b) a clear declaration of our political views. We abandon all such position at the end of the struggle but try to regroup those who see that there is a wider struggle ahead on a clear political revolutionary platform inside and outside the workplace. This has the aim of politically preparing wider sections of the class for what needs to be done in the future. Without all this, without conscious anti-capitalist organisation we will never create a society in which the free development of each one of us is the basic condition for the free development of us all.

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.

Timex and the Unions

Dear Comrades

On yesterday's mass picket at the Dundee Timex plant I read a copy of your leaflet with interest. Whilst I agree with the need to intensify the fight at Timex I remain to be convinced that the unions are somehow the main obstacle to winning solidarity action. Of course, union leaders will always sell out struggles and of course militant unionism or Scargill-type syndicalism won't bring down the capitalist state. However to argue as you do that "the union organisations have to be cut out of the process" begs the question — how do you intend to reach wide layers of workers without working in the only existing mass working class organisations at present?

Like it or not it is a fact that the main reason the Timex workers have maintained solid pickets for three months and been able to publicise their dispute nationally through speaking tours etc. over the heads of the bosses' media is that Timex was one of the best (union) organised engineering plants in Britain.

One final question. Would you advocate that communists who are miners or firefighters (for example) refuse on principle to join union mass meetings or abstain from union-sponsored ballots for strike action?

I would therefore like to know more about the Communist Workers' Organisation and its politics. Perhaps you could send me a sample of your paper to clarify for me the other positions you hold.

Yours in solidarity,

RM

Our Reply

Dear R.
Thanks for your response to the leaflet which we find both serious and welcome since it gives us the chance to clarify the issues you raise.

We don't think unions are the main obstacles to winning solidarity action. That rests in the consciousness of the workers themselves. The unions can only get away with their tricks to contain the struggle within their (capitalist) framework so long as the workers let them. In the past the formation of trades unions by workers was part of the process of the working class defining itself as a class, becoming as Marx said a class in itself. Today though capitalism has reached a situation in which it cannot develop the productive capacity of humanity without at the same time inflicting war, famine and ever greater misery on the working class. In such a historical situation trades unions are not simply inadequate but their attempts to confine struggles to single trades or sections is a positive barrier to the working class becoming the revolutionary class which can create a new world system in the interests of humanity. This is why we constantly advocate that workers take the struggles back into their own hands (even if they start off in the terms that trades unions dictate).

Timex is a case in point. We disagree with your "fact" that Timex has been such a heroic fight because it was one of the best union organised engineering plants in Britain. It is true that the workers there have received better support from their union than most have over the last decade or so but this is not just a reward for past loyalty to the union but also because Timex workers themselves were prepared to take their struggle to other workers. What they failed to do was to link up with other workers in struggle and this again takes us back to the nature of trades unionism. The Timex workers didn't link up with the Yarrow workers or the Leyland Daf workers on Clydeside nor with the miners and railworkers and none of these have yet generalised their struggles to take in the fact that every struggle today is for all workers. This is what our constant message is.

The second part of our message is that workers themselves have to run their own strikes and disputes and they must find means other than the unions to do this because today the unions

are organisations of permanent accommodation with capitalism. Funds used to pay pensions to fulltime officials are hardly likely to be used, as they were in the last century for an out and out struggle by the workers who have paid into them.

Finally to take up the issue of our position regarding what individual members of the CWO do in relation to the struggles of our class. In our Statutes we state that members are not only allowed to join unions but positively encouraged to do so wherever this gives them a greater possibility of an audience inside the working class. If you can only go to a meeting if you are a union member then it would be ridiculous to abstain from doing so (and we can then call for the meetings to open to all workers and for links with other sectors as well as suggesting ways which break down workers dependence on the unions). However we have no illusions about capturing the leadership of such unions since we have all seen that such attempts only compromise the would-be revolutionary. The unions don't suffer simply from bad leadership as the Trotskyists pretend but are capitalist structures which drain the lifeblood from rank and file militants who become dependent on them. Again our statutes allow members to sit on strike committees but only as recallable delegates and always making clear their political sympathies. We want to be part of the open process of the development of class consciousness and not part of some trick to con workers into following a programme they don't accept (we leave that to the Stalinists and Trotskyists).

We obviously can't answer all your questions fully without further discussion but we are sending you some of our past publications including the text of a speech a comrade recently made in a debate with Dave Douglass of **Class War** on this issue. We intend to edit this for publication in *Workers' Voice* 67 (due out soon)¹. Also enclosed is a copy of the second leaflet we have given out at Timex (today).

Internationalist communist greetings

Jock

(for the CWO)

¹Page 4 of this issue.

Labour and the Unions — Keeping up the Con-trick

Following their fourth successive General Election defeat the leaders of the Labour Party again started searching for a magic formula to con enough people into voting for them next time around.

Alongside the usual Parliamentary games of saying rude things about the other political parties they went in for the other old favourite of selecting a new leader, although this time they managed to select one with a level of charisma about equal to a soggy sponge pudding. The new leadership promptly showed its worth by being the star turns in the Hyde Park mass diversion of the fight against the mine closures.

The general thrust of the political posturing shows no signs of any significant change. Vague and ill-defined commitments to the remnants of the post-1945 welfarism are combined with calls for increased state intervention to increase the profitability of British capitalism. There are also clearly instances where by, for example, opposing cuts to spending on the armed forces and calls for increased intervention in ex-Yugoslavia they are prepared to outdo the Government in the ideological and practical preparations for the drift to war.

In order to stay within the mainstream of ruling-class thought they remain as keen as ever to distance themselves from the myth of 'Union Power', one of the great bogeys which the mass media use to terrify the electors. This struggle to pacify the media barons has caused tensions between the Trade Union leaders who leech off

working class subscriptions and the Labour parliamentarians whose privileges are based on (largely) working class votes.

In the run-up to the Party election in the autumn it is clear that there will be a continuing wave of hot air in the papers and on the TV about the financial and political relationship between Labour and the Unions. On the one hand the centre of the Party leadership and certain Union leaders such as the AEEU will campaign against the Union block vote in order to maintain the distance from the 'Union Power' allegations.

In the alternative camp there are other MP's who believe that they can gain power by appealing to more traditional Labourism even to the point of posturing as fighters in the class struggle. That group of windbags, with the 'Campaign' group and their leftist cheerleaders at the centre, will form a bloc with those Trade Union leaders who believe that they might lose their perceived influence and consequently risk losing yet more of their subscription base.

It is of course clear to Marxists and probably equally to the Labour and Trade Union parasites that this debate is precisely about form rather than substance. Quite simply, their roles as twin pillars of bourgeois society is not based on the Labour Party's internal voting systems but in their combined and parallel tasks of leading workers into safe capitalist practices.

Ever since the inception of the party the Union machines and the Labour Parliamentarians have

maintained a symbiotic relationship. Whether they happen to be tacking to the right or the left both wings of the Labour movement have tied workers into capitalism.

The reality of the 'beer and sandwiches at No. 10' syndrome has been the Unions acting as recruitment sergeants in two world wars, the strikes of the early 1970's being defused by a Labour Government in 1974, and a string of austerity plans, social contracts, compacts etc. stretching out over the last 70 years. For those may have forgotten it was the Callaghan-Healey cuts of the 1977-9 period which prepared the way for the attacks of the Thatcher period. The working class resistance of the winter of discontent in 1979 only demonstrated to the ruling class (which encompasses all the parliamentary parties) that Labour would not be the instrument to attack the class best. They could be saved until class militancy became too strong. Up to now they have not been needed but the cries from the likes of the Socialist Workers' Party and the Trotskyists entryist groups to "Get the Tories Out" is entirely within the game plan of the capitalists. Whilst they might talk about being "revolutionary" these Labour hangers on are just the next wave of bourgeois mystification which the workers will have to see through. But all these manoeuvres and lies can only work so long as the working class itself remains passive in the face of the attacks from all sides.

The Labour Party and Trade Unions both depend on a combination of working-class passivity and decades of misrepresentation of the real nature

of bourgeois society to hide the necessity for working-class struggle to overthrow the decadent capitalist order.

The various factions within the Trade Union and Labour leadership may well keep on shadow boxing for some time.

Whatever the outcome we know that if they achieve a parliamentary majority all factions will make sure that the workers are still bound hand and foot to the bosses and their system.

KT

Continued from Last Issue

Imperialism

The New World Order

The "victory of the West" in the cold war has not and could not open a new era of peace, for imperialism has not gone with the collapse of one imperialist power (Russia is still imperialist, but the boundaries of its spheres of influence have virtually retreated to within the frontiers of the old USSR).

The same economic base continues to exist and the conflict supported by it must also continue, even if the probable sides in the conflict have changed. At the moment the surviving major imperialist powers co-operate to plunder the produce of the world's proletariat. But this "peaceful" division of the world is merely the precondition for a warlike redivision.

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was motivated by its need to settle its debts to Kuwait (through the invasion itself) and to the major imperialists (by exploiting the Kuwaiti oilfields and the proletarians working there). In short, its annexation was to satisfy the imperialists' thirst for extra-profits and not to thwart that thirst. Repudiation of debts was never seen by the Iraqi bourgeoisie as an option⁴.

What worried the US in the Gulf conflict was the **particular** rôle played by Iraq within the framework of imperialism. If Iraq was allowed to continue the relative freedom granted to it when the US and its allies needed it in an entirely different situation (that is, in the context of a world dominated by the conflict between US and USSR imperialism and of a Middle East the stability of which was threatened by the Iranian

sustain that belief until the reality breaks in: capitalism's crisis is not manageable. Then they will try and solve the crisis by **forcing** each other to pay an unacceptable part of the cost.

A Return to Colonialism?

Because the USSR was economically the weaker imperialism, it was less able to dominate its sphere of influence primarily by economic means. In order to function as an imperialism at all, it was compelled to resort to military domination of Eastern Europe.

As the US appears to be destined to be economically weaker than Japan and Germany in certain senses (technologically and in terms of profitability, although the mass of US capital will be greater for some time to come), does this mean that the US too will now be forced to resort to direct military domination? The answer appears to be yes, as evidenced by Grenada, which is admittedly somewhat peripheral, Panama, which is clearly vital to US interests, and Somalia, despite the complicating factor of UN involvement.

The Somali case is particularly interesting. Given that the US is not there to supply humanitarian aid (such a purpose would be unprecedented in the history of imperialism), what are they there for? The answer appears to be that it is imperialism on the cheap — the US seeks to demonstrate its power where it can do so in order to discipline others into accepting US world domination. More intractable problems like Bosnia and Cambodia find no US intervention. These are left to a weak UN to try to deal with.

The Future...

Marxism is not an aid to clairvoyance which enables its adherents to predict the future with infinite precision without doing any work. What it does enable us to do is put empirical evidence into a framework which lays down the limits within which the creativity of history must go about its business. Although the "space" between these limits can never be reduced to zero, the more work that is done the narrower the gap becomes.

From a general perspective we can see that although war is inevitable under imperialism, generalised war between imperialists will not happen until certain conditions have been ful-

Secondly, the protagonists must be of roughly equal strength, as, if a power cannot hope to win against a stronger antagonist, it will retreat and look for allies, and it will tend to find them, as the stronger power will in general have more enemies. This process is one of manoeuvring prior to war, and it will become more and more discernable in the future.

In reality, this separation of the process is somewhat schematic as these phases tend to occur together.

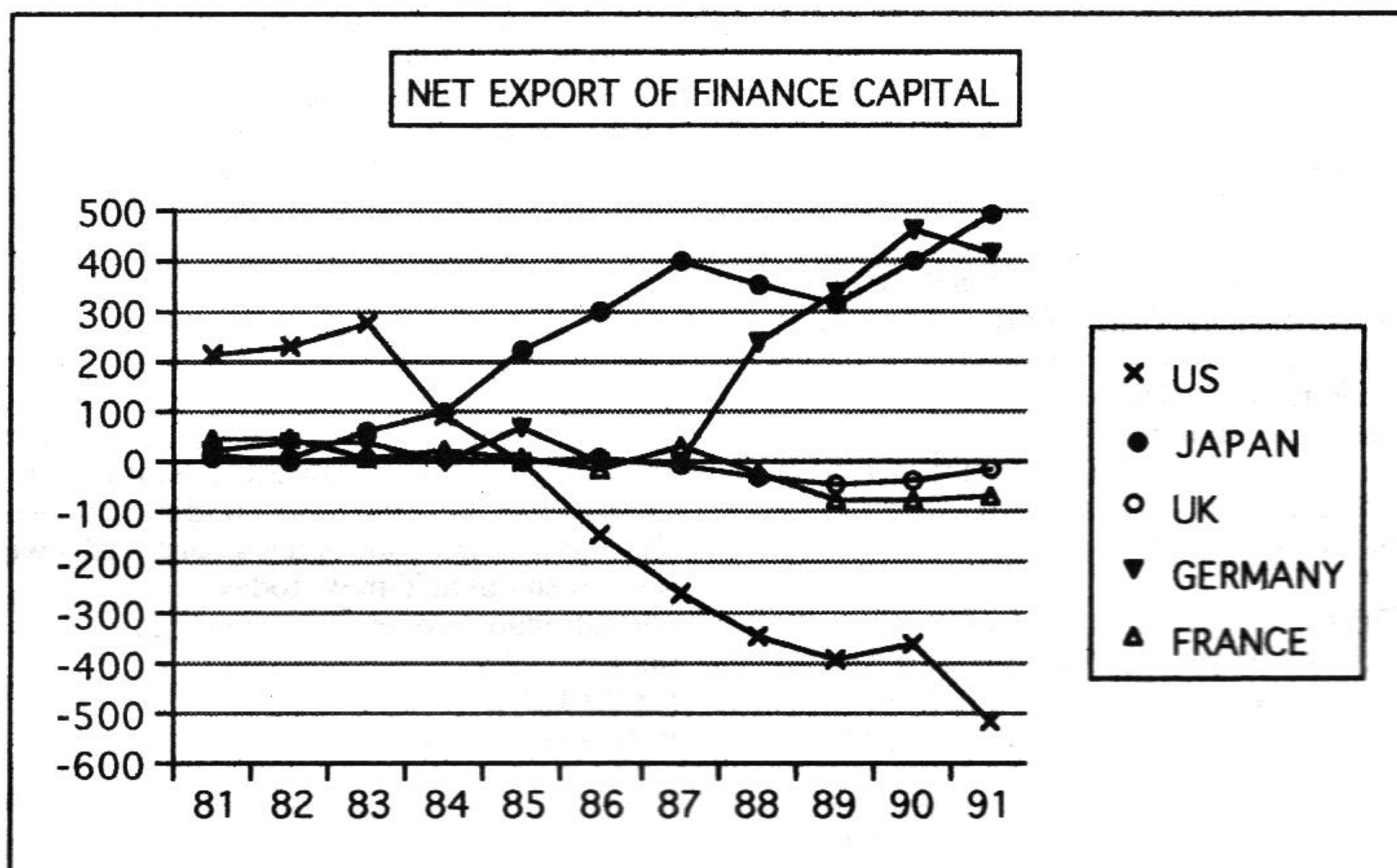
Becoming more concrete, the weakening of the US economy *vis-à-vis* Germany and Japan is a material basis for conflict, because its weaker economy no longer "justifies" its domination. On the other hand, the weakening should not be over emphasised. Neither Germany nor Japan has at its disposal the mass of resources necessary to take on the US on its own. This does not mean that the basis for the conflict is removed, but it does mean that both Germany and Japan need allies in that conflict.

There can be no certainty here, but there seems to be three possibilities. First, Japan and Germany reach an understanding against the US; second, Japan draws massive benefits and allies from its recent turn to China (incidentally, present-day Japanese penetration there differs immensely from the '30's military adventures — today it is on a base of economic superiority, and not to "protect" Manchuria *etc.* from more developed powers) and other neighbours and faces the US while Germany preserves itself for conflict at a later stage; third, the rôles of Germany and Japan are reversed, with Germany relying on the EC (or more likely a rump of the EC) and whatever allies it can gather in Eastern Europe.

It should not be forgotten that there is a timebomb ticking away in the crisis-ridden countries of the former USSR.

...and Who Pays for it

The working class is already paying for capitalism's crisis in a hundred and one ways. The bourgeoisie of each imperialism rubs its hands when it is able to draw workers into its competition. For example, the US has compensated for its relatively antiquated productive apparatus (one survey some years ago put the average age of US industrial plant at 25 years, of German plant at 10 years and the figure for Japan was 8 years!) by depressing wages. According to the



The charts¹ displayed here supply some evidence for the need for this redivision. The net export of finance capital is clearly a measure of the strength of an economy as imperialist. It reflects the ability of an economy to generate capital (or drain it from elsewhere in a previous round of export) and offer it at more "generous" terms than the importer's capitalists, despite any barriers the importing country might erect.

And there has been a veritable revolution here. From being the world's largest exporter of finance capital in 1981, the US imported in 1991 roughly three times as much as it previously exported, and Germany and Japan both exported in 1991 roughly twice what the US exported a decade earlier³.

The figures regarding state indebtedness reveal both the extent to which the crisis is hitting the state and how far away from classical liberalism capitalism has come — rather than cutting back on state "interference" in the economy, the state sinks into debt because that interference is vital.

Having had this brief glance at the actual figures which demonstrate the instability of capitalism (but do not in any way determine the **fine** detail of that instability), we can now look at some of the world's recent history.

Iraq: an Exception?

Was Iraq a potential exception to the rule that a national state is no longer able to utilise national independence to develop economic independence? After all, it defied all the "coalition" forces in the Gulf War, apparently to defend that independence.

The answer has to be no.

We must first remember that Iraq's military might was built up by the West because it was **their** agent. It was the CIA in 1980 who urged him to attack Iran to defend US interests. But when it became clear that Iraq was becoming a regional imperialist power on the back of that support, the West (which had a profitable arms trade with Iraq until then) pulled the plug. Saddam's régime was left only with debts.

"revolution"), then the US's control over the price of petrol would be impaired. As the US has oil reserves of its own, this control is a lever it possesses over its rivals.

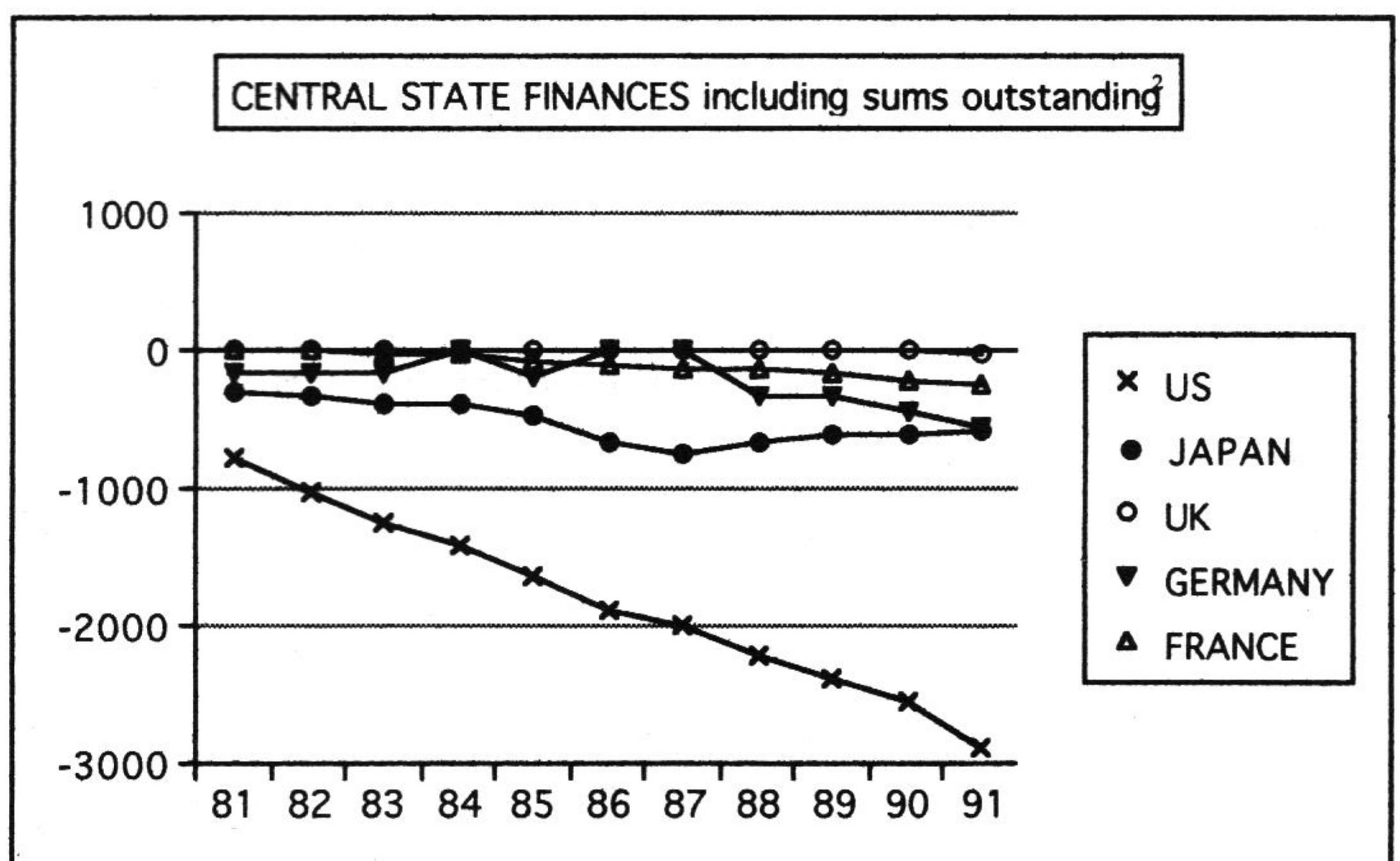
That these rivals supported (with a little bit of grumbling) the "coalition" shows that, at that time, how strong the imperialists' belief that they could manage the crisis jointly was. To break with the US would have been to break with this consensus⁵.

Ex-Yugoslavia

Here the conflicts between the imperialists are becoming more visible although they are still contained within the consensus. Germany, and to a lesser extent other powers like Italy, supported the drawing of relatively developed Croatia and Slovenia away from the Yugoslav federation, as these republics provided a better environment for export of capital (see *Workers' Voice* 58). On the other hand, the US at first opposed this split, in order to impede Germany's interests, and later, when it became a question of preempting an intervention by Europe, supported the UN's entry. How little the US is really opposed to Serbia's attempts to grab territory and put a spoke in Germany's wheel is revealed by its past insistence that the arms embargo applies as much to Bosnia as to Serbia. This meant that Bosnia remained handicapped by its previous poor military resources, while Serbia retained its military advantage.

Germany wants Bosnia to be a buffer state to shelter Croatia while it drains value from this country, while the US wants a stable situation not dominated by Germany or the EC. But both Germany and the US are constrained by the desire to avoid open conflict between themselves, so both hide their support for the local forces behind the UN's intervention, and the US wants to avoid the early annihilation of Bosnia, and so has reversed its earlier policy of advocating the blockade.

However, this desire to avoid face to face confrontation is dependent on the sustaining of the belief that the imperialist powers can manage their crisis peacefully, negotiating which portion of the burden each carries, and they can only



filled. Firstly, the powers have to become convinced that they cannot manage the crisis peacefully, negotiating the share the burden they will inflict on each other. As, in reality, they cannot peacefully manage the crisis, it is inevitable that they realise that, and they will seek to force each other to take more and more. The first stage in this is the drift towards trade war. This is already happening (the long drawn out failure to reach a GATT agreement is itself due to imperialist manoeuvring). The second stage is when trade war becomes war.

Economist, the average real hourly wage of US workers has decreased by 13% over the past decade, while West German and Japanese workers had small increases (more than offset, without a doubt, by increases in exploitation). But just this shows the way for Japanese and German bosses to perform the same trick and deprive the US of this particular competitive advantage, by pushing "their" workers' wages down.

And if workers do not develop the capacity to fight the bosses' little tricks in the trade war, and

continued on facing page

TIMEX: Class Struggle is Still Alive

continued from front page

come from class solidarity and not from alliances with the left-wing of capital.

Self-Organisation: the Way Forward

The lessons of Timex are that sympathy and mass pickets are not enough. Isolated in a single industry workers are always in a weak position because in today's crisis the capitalists will just withdraw their capital and shut the industry down. Alongside the escalation of the Timex dispute, the firefighters, civil servants, local government workers, railwaymen and many others are preparing to enter into struggle. Fighting alone within the confines of a single industry or workplace under terms dictated by the unions, is a sure recipe for defeat today. The only possibility of success now lies in the inter-industry extension of self-organisation outside union control. The raising of common demands would, in itself, be a significant step in shifting the balance of class forces.

If picketing is going to be more than a token publicity gesture, we have to organise for ourselves the way forward. Principally this means three things:

1. Workers from outside the immediate workplace have to be drawn into the day to day organisation of the fight. Workers from several Dundee workplaces took strike action to join the **Timex demo on April 12th**. Walk-outs hit NCR, Levi Jeans, non-unionised Bulkbag and Ninewells hospital laundry. Benefit offices have been leafletted urging the unemployed not to scab. It is vital that workers refuse to deliver any supplies to the Timex factory and refuse to transport or work with any Timex products. Postmen no longer deliver to Timex and TGWU bus drivers will not take buses into the factory.

2. Workers must learn to fight by whatever means are effective whether it involves street meetings occupations, demonstrations, mass pickets or other actions. We must have no truck with those who prattle about the "rule of law". Timex Dundee makes circuit boards for IBM computers, switch circuits for Stoke-on-Trent based Creda cookers and packs clocks/watches. All Timex products world-wide should be blacked. The AEEU and the STUC refuse to call for blacking due to their craven obedience to capitalist statue. International solidarity is growing. Pickets have descended on Olsen's offices in Norway and his offices in Oslo had their windows smashed on 17th June. Times workers in Connecticut USA (site of Timex world HQ) have expressed solidarity. Disputes are simmering in several workplaces. Local firm ABB Nitran backed down on plans to make 60 odd workers redundant, probably due to management's fear of the Timex factor.

3. Mass meetings of workers should always run the struggle. Delegations for any tasks should be elected by meetings of all workers involved from amongst themselves and must be answerable to and instantly recallable by those meetings. This isn't democratic fetishism. Only through structures which demand active participation from all workers can we rediscover the solidarity and consciousness necessary to turn the present balance of forces in our favour.

We owe to the Timex workers to act on these lessons.

Imperialism

continued from facing page

that means, in the long term, the overthrow of the bosses' entire system, they will pay for it with their lives in the bosses' wars, and the longer these wars continue without being "transformed into civil war" between classes, the more lives will be paid.

EDL

Notes

¹These are compiled from statistics given in the OECD's country surveys. The currency unit in both cases is \$1bn, and the exchange rate used is that pertaining at the end of the relevant year. It should be noted that the figures given by countries to the OECD are compiled on different bases and so it is the trend in the relative figures that is important. In particular, all the figures include outstanding amounts, except for those for the UK, which only supplies the OECD with settled amounts. As all the other countries' central government debt appears less serious when the outstanding amounts are neglected, does this mean that the UK has something to hide?

²The German figure is for central state and Länder debt, as central state debt is not supplied to the OECD. Hence, the German figure looks worse than it actually is. On the other hand, as the expenditure of the individual States of the US will be relatively high, the US figures look better(!) than they are.

³The drops in production over the last two years in both Japan and Germany are unlikely to reverse this trend, even if it is slowed down.

⁴Even where the bourgeoisie do "consider" repudiation (as in several South American countries), it is more a posture to obtain better conditions for repayment. The major imperialists are reluctant enough to grant new credits without the threat of nonpayment, and all realistic development projects of any scale require loans.

⁵The domination of the US over the action in the Gulf served (whether it was intended to or not) to warn peripheral countries not to make use of their "freedom" to move from the US sphere of influence to that of any open rival of the US in the future. To believe, as some do, that the Gulf war was to warn the US's rivals of the consequences of that rivalry is tantamount to saying that Japan, Germany and the rest would engage in self-flagellation, because they supported the US's intervention! This is especially true as Japan supplied the vital 10% of components which distinguished American weaponry from Second World War hardware!

Life of the Organisation

Who are we?

The Communist Workers Organisation has existed since 1975 but the political origins of our positions are much older. We regard ourselves as heir to a common tradition which goes from the Communist League of Marx and Engels through the First, Second and Third Internationals to, most recently, those left currents which were expelled from the Third International in the 1920's as the process of Stalinisation developed.

We have always been opposed to Stalinism, Maoism, Trotskyism and all the other counter-revolutionary distortions of Marxism.

Since 1984 we have formed part of the **International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party** initiated by **Il Partito Comunista Internazionale** (*Battaglia Comunista*). The Platform of this organisation can be found in the first edition of its journal *Internationalist Communist Review* (formerly *Communist Review*) (£1 from the group address) but our basic positions are at the foot of this page.

Appeal to Readers

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.

Other Publications

The Platform and Statutes of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party These are now available in English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Bengali and Farsi. Each price £1.

Internationalist Communist Review

is the central organs in English of the IBRP. Each individual issue is £1.50.

Revue Comunista

in French (write to CWO address),

Internationalist Notes

in Farsi

Prometeo

Theoretical journal of the Internationalist Communist Party (Italy)

Battaglia Comunista

Monthly paper of the PCInt (Italy)

We also have publications in **Bengali, Slovene, Czech, and Serbo-Croat**. Please write to the appropriate address. (PCInt for **Internationalist Notes**)

Subscription rates

Subscription to **WORKERS' VOICE** (6 copies): £2.50 in UK and Eire, £4.00 elsewhere.

Subscription to **WORKERS' VOICE** (6) and **Internationalist Communist Review** (2): £4.50 UK/Eire, £5.50 elsewhere.

Supporter's subscription: £10

Cheques should be made payable to "CWO Publications"

Back issues of most publications are available.

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

Pamphlets

CWO Pamphlet No. 1

Economic Foundations of Capitalist Decadence £1

CWO Pamphlet No. 2

1917 £2

Internationalist Communist Review 11

is now current and includes articles on:

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

New publication in French

BC Inform No. 1

is now available containing articles on the situation in Italy, a polemic with *Le Proletaire* and an editorial on the purpose of the publication. It will be sent free to any subscribers who request it. For others it is 50p per copy.

Meetings

Readers' Meetings

London

These will be held regularly in Conway Hall. The next is on Trotskyism on Friday July 30th. Write to group address for details.

Sheffield

On imperialism, Friends Meeting House, 7:30pm, Tuesday 27th July.

Addresses for all correspondence

CWO
BM Box CWO, London WC1N 3XX.

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

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!

Fortress Europe: A Bastion of Racism

Nothing brings out the hypocrisy of our ruling class better than the issue of racism. Over the past months we've seen Government leaders throughout Europe verbally condemn racist attacks like those in Solingen whilst they've quietly been passing laws which attack immigrant workers with a vengeance.

The recent attacks in Germany show how bare-faced our rulers can be. They quickly denounced the murders in Mölln and Solingen as the work of neo-Nazis, but when Turkish workers at Solingen called for action to be taken against the Right it was just as quickly announced that the attacks were not organised at all and merely the work of individual loonies. But the Government did not just stop with washing its hands of political responsibility for fighting the extreme Right. It has decided instead to continue its own attack on Turkish and "immigrant" workers. This includes new draconian immigration laws from July 1st onwards and a change the constitution to restrict the number of immigrants it will allow inside its borders.

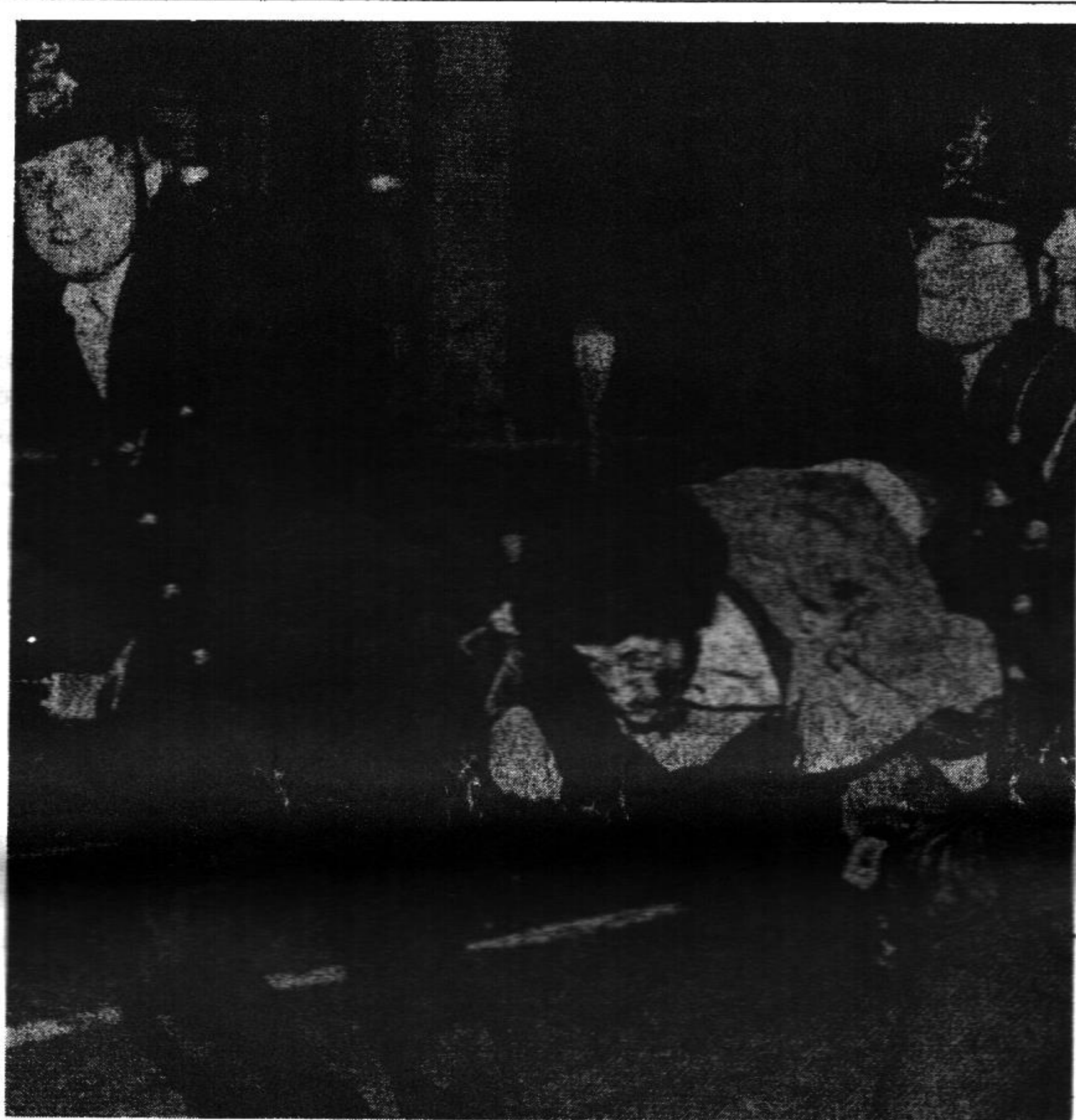
Likewise the French and British Governments are increasingly looking at ways to tighten up their immigration laws. The French state recently tried to 'prove' its anti-Nazism by announcing it intended to try a 78 year old Nazi collaborator, despite the fact that he had been running around France freely since the end of the last war. Behind this feeble posturing is a state which daily attacks workers from immigrant backgrounds, as the recent 'accidental' point blank shooting of a young black worker detained in the central Paris police station testifies. The British are even more ridiculous. They try to pass off the Germans as Nazis by nature whilst the police here are famous for harassing black workers and failing to act against racist assaults. At the same time, the state prefers to gaoil innocent immigrants rather than guilty racists. The Home Office has imprisoned over 200 people under the Immigration laws until they decide whether to let them in or not. Some are held for three months, some longer, as a deliberate policy to deter workers trying to migrate.

The Roots of Racism

It is no coincidence that state attacks on black or immigrant workers are increasing at the same time as the economies of Europe slide deeper and deeper into crisis. We all know what a joke the green shoots of recovery are in Britain. For the rest of Europe they are held up as evidence — that the crisis is coming to an end. The French government has just announced a sharp rise in unemployment (official figures had set unemployment at 3 millions). Germany has experienced its steepest downturn for the past twenty-five years, with the leading industrial companies, including Lufthansa and Daimler-Benz, announcing falling profits. Volkswagen announced a staggering loss of DM1.247 billion this year. Our rulers have good cause to worry at their own forecasts. The EC Commission predicts negative growth for the Community as a whole this year. Unemployment is set to rise officially above 20 millions and the Community's budget is said to be in a "precarious state".

It is hardly surprising, given this background of economic disaster, that each European state is bent upon attacking the weakest sections of the working class — the immigrant workers. Throughout history workers who have had to move in search of work have always borne the brunt of capitalist attacks. They have been used

and discarded by the ruling class as they see fit. Thus, in the boom years Britain, France and Germany encouraged cheap labour from overseas (e.g. Turkey in the case of Germany and the West Indies in the case of the UK). Immigrant labour power was invaluable in helping the capitalists build their economies after the war. But now that crisis once again looms, this section of the working class is amongst the first to suffer. They comprise a disproportionate percentage of the unemployed and now face long-term unemployment. In addition they now conveniently serve a new purpose — as a scapegoat for the failure of capitalism. As the economic crisis deepens and the state gets bolder in its attacks, all kinds of racist low-life emerge in the absence of any class response to the crisis. The neo-Nazis may grab the headlines for their vicious thuggery but they could not act with such confidence were



"The neo-Nazis may grab the headlines for their vicious thuggery but they could not act with such confidence were it not for the democratic state and its racist police..."

it not for the democratic state and its racist police protection force.

Divide and Rule

Direct state attacks on black and immigrant workers serve a very real purpose for the bosses. The anti-immigration laws of Fortress Europe will not actually prevent mass immigration. (How could it, when the imperialist manoeuvrings of the various governments creates such misery and hardship that thousands are forced each week to uproot their lives and travel in search of work and/or flee to escape a certain death?) It will, however, ensure an even cheaper supply of 'illegal' labour power which can be used to push general wage levels down. This has been used by bosses in the USA for decades. Once in a while the state's immigration officials will descend on workplaces and deport those without green cards. For the most part however, the state is aware of the value of illegal workers and knows what a boost to profits they can be.

Establishing laws against immigrant workers also drives a wedge between those workers with legal rights and those without. It creates a layer of workers who are easy targets for economic and physical attack and so weakens the position of the working class as a whole.

In short, the state's treatment of immigrant workers gives a clear signal to the Right that their aims are more likely to be appeased than op-

posed. It gives a green light to politicians from Le Pen to Winston Churchill, all of them blaming the ills of capitalism on foreigners and poisoning workers' minds with divisive anti-working class propaganda.

Whilst the Right tries to divide the working class by blaming one section for the problems of capitalism, the Left avoids calling for any real defence on a working class basis. Instead it calls for the defence of democracy against Nazi attacks. This is indeed a stunning piece of politics because it allows the Left to do what they do best: take up a militant posture that won't actually do any harm to capitalism. As far as the Left is concerned, if capitalism is democratic it's worth defending. Instead of taking up the issue of how racism is being used by democratic capitalism to divide worker against worker it turns the question into one of defence of democracy with a human (hypocritical) face.

As communists we agree that Nazism and racism must be opposed by workers, but this must be from the basis of their own class interests — i.e. with the awareness that a truly non-racist society can only come about when class divisions themselves have disappeared. And that means first of all uniting as a class to defend themselves wherever, however and whatever particular section is being attacked. It by no means signifies that workers should follow one faction of capital under the banner of democracy. Whilst the Left is running around screaming about the evils of Nazism it forgets one small point — the present outrages are the work and product of democracy. It is the present German state which has abused Turkish workers for years, ignoring racist attacks and exploiting them to the hilt by giving them the most dangerous, dirtiest, lowest-paid jobs. It is the democratic German state which now stands by whilst workers are attacked and killed. The neo-Nazi groups operating in Germany could not do so without a compliant police force. It is

the democratic state which was quick to react against the three days of rioting by workers protesting at attacks in Solingen. And in Britain and France it is no secret that the police have harassed and killed black workers at will. It is a democratic Britain which provides black workers with the highest long-term unemployment rates and the least prospect of work for school leavers. The point is that it is democratic capitalism which creates the climate in which the physical attacks take place because capitalist democracy is racist, and necessarily so! Racism is not something that can be reformed out of existence. Nor are Nazism and democracy the two separate entities the Left likes to think they are.

The Left argues that the working class benefit from the freedom of democracy and that it is less racist than fascism. This may sound a little bit hollow to the predominantly female and Asian workers at the Burnsall factory in Smethwick who have been on strike for nearly a year and have faced a barrage of racist abuse and physical assaults by scabs and management. While the press have hardly given the strike a high profile the police have been quick to charge workers attacked by scabs with violent disorder! The democratic state is not neutral, nor can it be used to fight racism. Capitalism, like all class societies before it, is racist and always will be.

This is why calls for a united front with democratic and capitalist forces like the Anti-Nazi

League to fight fascism are not only ineffectual, they are dangerous, since they lock workers who see the need to fight a vile aspect of capitalism within the confines of the bosses' politics. The defence of democracy is not an attack on racism. The favourite call of the left in Germany, for instance, is for Turkish workers to have their 'own' MPs! In practice this means that class rule becomes slightly more sophisticated. In Britain black MPs like Paul Boateng and Keith Vaz are light years away from defending black workers. They are more interested in defending Lloyd's Names and BCCI investors which shows where their class allegiance lies.

Fighting Fascism means Fighting Capitalism

History has shown us that the racists and fascists are not defeated by capitalist democracy and its left-wing advocates. Nazism was only possible in Germany once the working class as a class had been defeated and we owe the defeat of the German Revolution to the Social Democrats — the equivalent of the Labour Party. It was they who hired the right-wing death squads to kill thousands of revolutionary workers and crush the revolution in 1919.

At present in Britain the anti-fascist circus is a sideshow which acts as a recruiting ground for leftists. Each group or grouplet is manoeuvring within an umbrella force like the ANL or the AFA or even has its own front like the RCP's Workers against Racism to prove its political credentials. Meanwhile racist attacks go on and nothing is done to help, for example, the Somali families recently hounded out of the Manor estate in Sheffield.

But the way to defeat racism and Nazism is clear. It is by the working class as a whole fighting for its own class politics. It is through the formation of groups of workers to fight racist attacks and propaganda on a daily basis. The calls from some of the Left for the defence of "communities" based along racial lines is no defence. Dividing workers along the lines of race, nation, or religion is what the capitalists do. Such campaigns also run into the dead end of defending non-working class elements like small businessmen whilst leaving individual workers to the mercy of the fascists. And any defence which is isolated from the bulk of the working class will never be strong enough. As some Turkish workers said after the attack in Solingen, any offensive against Nazis will also have to include the German workers. But such attempts to achieve class unity will also have to confront elements from the Left. The Turkish experience in Germany also showed this. The calls of the Turkish workers for a general strike were quickly turned into a stoppage of 15 minutes by the Trades Unions, fearful in case any real action emerged. Racism has to be defeated by class action and the racists dealt with as class enemies. One hundred and twenty years ago Marx wrote,

Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded.

Capital

This is not only still true today, it is far more urgent for workers to overcome the racial and national divisions imposed upon them by capitalism, and by democratic capitalism at that. When Turkish workers rioted in Germany they were joined by their German comrades. This is a hopeful sign for the future. They both face the same enemy — the German ruling class. And today this also includes the trades unions. The trades unions in all Western democracies will try to keep workers divided, seeing cheap immigrant labour as a threat to their existence. The Left will only fight for capitalism and its democracy. Only class unity in action linked to the communist programme can destroy racism and the capitalist system which spawns it.

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