

# WORKERS VOICE

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## Behind the massacres stands international capital

### Genocidal War

For centuries the standard cliché for genocidal war was Genghis Khan and the Mongol Horde but even these massacres had a rational material base compared with the genocide of the present century. For those trying to pretend that the only "holocaust" was that of Hitler against the Jews (a convenient fiction for justifying the present Israeli oppression of Palestinians) in an otherwise civilised century the evidence is too overwhelming to be ignored. Just calculating the numbers of the dead in wars in the twentieth century is a grisly exercise which has no parallel in any other time in history. "Total War" which is visited on an entire population and not just fought by armies in the field is not just a product of new technological means of destruction. It is a product of capitalism in its monopolistic and imperialist stage. The "parasitism and decay of capitalism", as Lenin called it, throws up the need for centralised state systems to even visit genocide on their "own" populations (Stalin's Russia, Franco's Spain and Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge) in order to cow the working class. At the same time wars are the products of the imperialist need to control the routes to raw materials and the supply of capital. Capitalism's tendency to economic slump provides a constant drive towards war as the ultimate solution to the problems of accumulation.

Of course the bourgeois press are not slow to find non-capitalist alibis for this destruction. Religion, we are told, lies behind the deaths of 200,000 in ex-Yugoslavia (with secular Bosnians constantly referred to as "Muslims"), whilst the same factor is said to explain the war in Yemen (despite the fact that Saudi Arabia and the US lie behind the Northern Yemen's final effort to crush the ex-Stalinist and pro-Saddam Southern Yemen faction in Aden).

### Rwanda: A Little History

In Rwanda a sickening massacre of 500,000 people in a population of around 8 millions we are told has got nothing to do with the outside world but everything to do with "tribal divisions". The truth is rather more complex.

The Central African region of great lakes and rivers like the Congo and Zambezi has been a theatre of confrontation between the great powers for centuries. To control the area the European powers have imposed artificial territorial boundaries on the area dividing ethnic groupings which for centuries previously lived at peace. Once the state was created one ethnic group would be turned into a ruling caste in alliance with the imperialist power and would organise the exploitation of the resources of the area to suit the needs of the colonial power. This was the fate of Rwanda.

Until 1919 Ruanda-Urundi (today the separate states of Rwanda and Burundi) was a German

colony which was handed to Belgium after the defeat of Germany. The Belgians supported the Tutsi monarchy as their puppet regime until 1959 when the Hutu majority led a "movement for national liberation" that was victorious in 1962 and resulted in the division of the area into two separate states.

The Rwandan economy is largely based on a relatively successful subsistence agriculture with most of the population widely spread out in small villages and farms. Almost half the export revenue is produced by coffee exports with tea and metal ores being the next most important. At first sight this is hardly a goldmine for imperialist involvement.

90% of the population belongs to the Hutu tribe whilst 9% are Tutsi, the other 1% being of the Twa tribe. When the Belgians left in 1962 there was a massacre of the Tutsi ruling caste which led them to flee the country. The Tutsi who remained became a marginalised minority facing great discrimination. It is the descendants of the Tutsi exiles who form today's leadership of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). In 1990 the RPF launched an invasion of the country from Uganda. After a bloody three year civil war the Hutu-led government and the RPF (which also contains Hutu opposition leaders) signed a peace accord at Arusha in Tanzania in August 1993.

This collapsed when the the plane carrying the President of Rwanda, Habyarimana - who had been dictator for more than twenty years after a bloody coup - was brought down. It is not yet clear who was responsible but it brought an end to the truce. Immediately the Presidential Guard and part of the regular Army embarked on revenge killings of Tutsi and Hutu opponents with the clear intention of wiping out the Tutsi. This has only given renewed support to the RPF which now looks likely to take over the entire country.

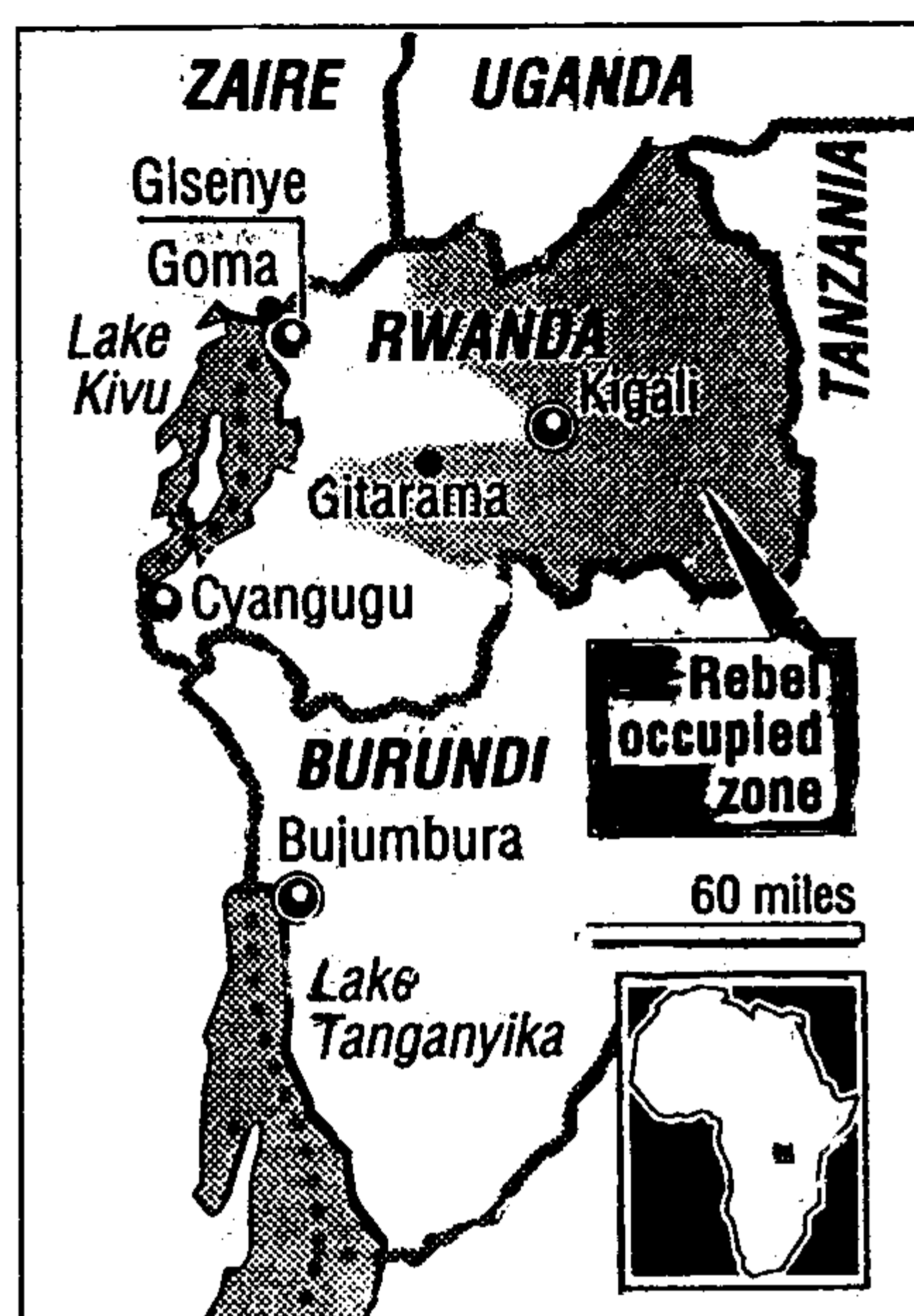
### Who is behind the genocide?

However this is not a tribal conflict. It is war for economic and political domination. The tribal affiliations of the contending ruling classes is not the cause of the conflict but only one of the factors which determine the actual line-up of the battles.

Revolutionaries give support to neither side. They are simply two bourgeois factions who are as barbaric as each other. The RPF's predecessors

behaved just like the present Hutu-dominated government when they were in power. Furthermore, last year in neighbouring Burundi, the Tutsi-dominated government and its Hutu majority led to 100,000 deaths.

But who is behind this power struggle? As in Bosnia and elsewhere it is the imperialist bandits of the West. The stakes they are playing for are the considerable mineral resources of Zaire (the ex-Belgian Congo), a territory which can be controlled from the frontier with Rwanda and Burundi. It should not be forgotten that these three areas alone provided almost all Belgium's war materials in the Second World War. This is why the real tragedy of Rwanda and elsewhere lies in the way the imperialists constantly intervene and play upon the ethnic divisions of



the local population. In fact the diplomatic rivalry between France on the one side - which has supported the present Rwandan ruling class since 1962 - and Britain, Belgium and the US who have used Uganda to support the RPF - is the clearest demonstration of how imperialist rivalries in the post-Cold War period are becoming increasingly complex and more open. And the support of Western governments does not stop at diplomacy. The merchants of death are arriving with arms from all over the planet. First amongst these is the French

government which is not content with diplomatic support and sending arms but is now sending troops in order to maintain its interests in the area. In direct opposition the British and US Governments are hypocritically talking of sending troops to "keep the peace" whilst in reality they want to ensure that the RPF does not lose the fruits of victory.

### Against imperialism

What Rwanda shows is not just that the end of the Cold War did not bring in a new era of peace but that in fact it has unleashed a whole series of conflicts nurtured by the different imperialist interests of the various Western powers. Today these interests are complex and often confused (see two articles in *Workers Voice No 71 The United States and World Domination* and *Imperialism's Re-emerging alliances mean war and terror* - both 50p from our London address). What is clear is that the end of colonialism did not mean the end of imperialism. It simply meant that colonialism was an inefficient form of imperialism where the military cost of policing the territory was more than it was worth. Far

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better to hand over the colony to an indigenous elite to run it in the interests of the imperialist power. Finance capital has no need of direct control in order to extort ever more surplus value from the former colonies. This and this alone explains why these areas are becoming more famine-ridden and more plagued by massacres and wars.

Here our humanitarian instincts are being played upon to dig deep to send money to the victims of imperialist war. Spokespeople of the bourgeois constantly hammer away at the refrain that these conflicts have local causes and that we are lucky that we don't have these problems here. This is to disguise what is really going on but it is a bluff which is becoming less believable by the month. As the war in Bosnia grinds on and UN generals say it will last into the next millenium the kind of war that imperialism creates is getting closer to the heartlands of Europe once again. In Bosnia there is a different line-up between the powers than in Rwanda.

*...although the international community is trying to paper over its differences on Bosnia, it is also clear that Britain and France, in an alignment inconceivable in the days of the cold war, stand alongside Russia on the Bosnian crisis in opposition to the US.*  
The Guardian 20.5.94

We cannot look on genocidal war (disguised in Bosnia as "ethnic cleansing") as something happening to others who live a long way away. We cannot end them by donating to charity and supporting the UN. The UN as we are seeing in Rwanda itself acts only as a stage on which some of the Western powers act out their rivalries. We can only end genocidal war by putting an end to capitalism itself. This is obviously not a quick fix but our first task today is to create an independent working class platform from which the future revival of the working class can be launched. Whilst the capitalist Left (including the various Trotskyists) always find a national liberation struggle to support (however much these are merely fronts for an alternative imperialism) only the internationalist communist left offers such an independent proletarian perspective. We appeal to all who understand this need to contact us and actively participate in laying the foundation for the future world party of the proletariat.



# The Situation of the Working Class and The Tasks of the Revolutionary Organisation

## A Report of the Annual General Meeting of the CWO

On June 11th the Communist Workers Organisation held its Annual General Meeting. The central theme was the question of organisation, or more precisely, the organisational tasks of the CWO in the present period. This concern is part of a continuing process of clarification which is going on in tandem with Battaglia Comunista (PCInt.) and within the International Bureau to which we belong.

The general lines of orientation which were accepted as the framework for the AGM's decisions will be published in the next issue of our theoretical journal - *Internationalist Communist Review*. Here in brief is a summary of the perspectives outlined and the main decisions taken at the meeting.

### Perspectives

It almost went without saying that today we are in anything but a revolutionary situation. The working class is more fragmented than ever before and the ways which it will respond to the crisis will be different to those of the past. CWO members recalled what we had written exactly ten years ago at the height of the British miners' strike. It showed that we recognised the stakes that were being played for then.

*Each day that passes increases the significance of the miners' strike. The endurance, solidity and combativity of the 130,000 miners on strike has been an inspiration to workers everywhere. Not only in Britain, where it has encouraged Leyland, Vauxhall, Ford and other workers to take up the fight against austerity, but from Japan to Poland to Belgium the British miners' cause has inspired other workers. A victory for the miners, in temporarily*

*pushing back the onslaught of the bosses, will encourage other workers to fight. Their defeat will make the bosses redouble their attacks. That is why the fight of the miners is the fight of the whole working class.*

*Workers Voice* 19 (November 1984).

Not only were we fully aware of the issues at stake but given that there were attempts by workers to break out of sectional struggles and link up with the miners' struggle we were also in a position to offer more concrete indications as to the path forward for the working class. The same article also highlighted the need for a general movement of the working class.

*No amount of militant fight by the miners alone will defeat the bosses... more important is for other workers to launch their own struggles, to open other fronts in the fightback, and to link these fights with those of the miners through joint picketing, demonstrations etc Everywhere workers are facing the same problems as the miners; threats of redundancy, falling real wages, infernal increases in exploitation.*

And, as we predicted, the defeat of the miners opened up the way for the most sustained attack on the working class since the Second World War ended. With strike levels falling to an all time low the situation facing the class is at present extremely grim and intermediate demands beyond basic calls for unification and solidarity are now very hard to put forward. The only thing which can benefit the working class is the revolution and political preparation for it. It is our task as revolutionaries to state this clearly in our militant activity.

Nor are we living in the era of the mass proletarian party. The organisation we are seeking to create

will not, and cannot, be built on a gradual basis of acquiring members for whom revolutionary activity is a more or less passive hobby. Yet these two axioms are not a justification for inertia.

### The Capitalist Crisis

We are still living in a period of chronic capitalist crisis. In fact this crisis (which opened in the early Seventies) is now the longest crisis in capitalist history. It is a crisis brought about by the end of the post-war cycle of accumulation and whilst the bourgeoisie has globally been able to manage it (the current international attempts to maintain the dollar being another example of this management) the bourgeoisie has not been able to solve it. This is why it is obliged to try to restructure its capital and continue its attacks on the working class. Despite the fact that the capitalist class would appear to be in a secure position after the failure of proletarian resistance during the last twenty years of crisis, they are now worried about the growing disillusion with the system, both at a political and an economic level. In other words, although we do not expect to be working at the same pitch of intensity as in the revolutionary period itself, there are tasks for the organisation apart from basic familiarisation of the membership with the revolutionary programme.

### Our Tasks

Before we can be in a position to fully carry out our basic task of "returning the communist programme to the working class" the meeting accepted that our goal must be the political and numerical development of the organisation. For this to happen we first of all need to have a systematic programme of political education. The political organisation must be a school of revolutionary Marxism and the meeting recognised that the group has an obligation to

train its members (old and new) in all aspects of political economy, and as propagandists for revolutionary politics. It was decided, therefore, to return to our previous practice of holding an educational session at every full meeting of the organisation (at present quarterly). Second, the absence of a range of pamphlets and educational documents on basic aspects of revolutionary marxism was acknowledged and it was agreed to formalise a programme of producing these, linked to the education sessions and to the results of local section work. As the first step in this, final comments and amendments were accepted for the draft of *Socialism or Barbarism*, a basic statement of our political positions, which will be published shortly. On local meetings, it was agreed that readers' meetings be continued or revived on a regular basis. In addition, where there is enough interest local CWO members should encourage the formation of study groups as a means of breaking isolation and engaging in dialogue with people of different political persuasions.

Next came the necessity to monitor and assess how far the organisation is achieving its aims. It was accepted that regular section and individual reports on specific matters need to be made via the internal bulletin and through verbal reports. Here the necessity to have a centre with responsibility for the direction of the overall organisation of the group became obvious. (Not, it was emphasised to impose a formal, 'bureaucratic' order over a passive membership, but as the expression of the fact that we are working to a common programme and as the most effective way of achieving a single-minded practice.) The Executive Committee, whose meetings had lapsed for some time, was thus formally revived along with the revised statutes of the CWO which were also approved by the meeting.

CWO, July 1994

## The Question of Consciousness

*continued from back page*

Engels and something which Marx tried to have incorporated in the programme of the SPD through his critique of the Gotha programme in 1875. Similarly the experience of the Russian revolution clarified many issues not previously raised such as the impossibility of the survival of an isolated communist country and the way such an outpost could degenerate into capitalism. Communist consciousness is therefore dynamic constantly being enriched in response to events. The same is true of the communist programme.

The crucial nature of the intervention of the party in winning the class to communist consciousness is illustrated by the comparison of the revolution in Russia with that in Germany. In Russia the Bolsheviks opposed the war in 1914 and propagandised for turning the imperialist war into a civil war and for revolution. In 1917 their politics were well known and by the intervention

of the party they were able to achieve a majority in the soviets supporting communist positions. In Germany revolutionaries stayed within the Social Democracy, the SPD, despite its support for the imperialist war, and only decisively broke from it in 1919 when the party was busily propping up capitalism and the bourgeois state. This break was only weeks before the outbreak of the revolution. The communist party was therefore unable to differentiate itself from the SPD and unable to intervene with communist positions and influence its consciousness. The strongest section of the working class in Europe was thus disarmed through the failure of its political party and the revolution ended in complete defeat. It was without doubt this defeat which led to the degeneration and defeat in Russia itself, and consequently to the long period of counter-revolution we have suffered since.

There are still today groups who think that the

working class will develop consciousness spontaneously through its struggles. They see the lessons of the past as being somehow retained at a deep level and a subterranean maturation of consciousness as continuing all the time. These ideas, insofar as they have a theoretical basis, see consciousness as a direct product of experience. That is they revert to the bourgeois materialism of Feuerbach which Marx criticised so devastatingly over 150 years ago in his *Theses on Feuerbach*.. History has proved these ideas wrong and will do so again.

The general point, which even a cursory study of history makes clear, is that communist understanding of the working class' position and the meaning of its struggles is abstracted from these struggles by revolutionaries and has an existence the class' political organisations. In general the lessons are not understood within the mass of the working class and they can only be

understood through intervention of the political party with these lessons in periods of rising class struggle, when the class starts to act collectively and feel its consciousness collectively. The examples of massive class struggles which failed because they remain dominated by bourgeois consciousness are being added to with every year that passes.

The formation of the political party of the working class is now more necessary than ever.

CP

### New Address

**Please note new Sheffield address on p.7. Both our addresses are equally valid but for speedier response to political correspondence use the Sheffield address.**

**All subscriptions and requests for back issues should be sent to the London address.**



# Revolutionaries and the Second World War

**September 1944.** The imperialist bloodbath known as the Second World War was drawing to a close. Already the victorious powers were drawing up plans for how the post-war world would be run and vying with each other to secure as much as they could from the post-war 'settlement'. In July representatives of forty-four states had gathered at Bretton Woods in New Hampshire and agreed to the formation of the World Bank and the IMF as the two economic pillars of the post-war world economy. Between August and September the shape of the main political institution, the United Nations was plotted at Dumbarton Oaks. Although Russia's military might which had won it vast territorial gains during the war and which had been crucial for beating the German war machine could not be ignored, there was no question about who was the overall victor. The USA, with 70% of the world's foreign exchange reserves and holding 40% of the world's productive apparatus within its (undamaged) territory was in by far the strongest position to dictate terms and exercise economic hegemony. For capitalism as a whole the unprecedented devastation of 'total war': the "substantial reductions" to the labour force (50 million dead is now considered a conservative estimate); the worn-out machinery that needed replacing; the wrecked flats and houses which needed rebuilding; the ruined ports and railway lines which needed renewing; the sunken ships which required reconstruction; all this and more provided the basis for economic recovery and

the generation of a new cycle of capital accumulation. For the working class, and by any rational definition of 'civilisation', there were no victors. The working class not only made up the vast bulk of the cannon fodder for imperialism during the war, but in its immediate aftermath the demands by capital for even further material sacrifices were if anything even greater, not just amongst the losing states. (In Britain, for example, rationing increased after the war with bread being rationed for the first time in 1946.) As the end of the war came in sight there was a spate of strikes in Europe by workers who had had enough of sacrifices. (In 1944 these included textile workers in Manchester and aircraft workers in Coventry.)

One of the most disturbing situations - for the bosses - was in Italy where there had already been strikes at Fiat in 1942 and massive anti-war demonstrations in 1943, accompanied by an increasing amount of desertions from the army. As the Italian ruling class ditched Mussolini and began its manoeuvres to avoid wholesale surrender to the Allies who were invading the peninsula from the south, the cry of "anti-fascism" became the order of the day. There were none more enthusiastic than the Socialist and Communist Parties who had lost out during the fascist dictatorship and who had now signed an action pact together (4.8.43) to promote the struggle to oust the "German fascists" who were in control north of Rome. As elsewhere in

occupied Europe, Communist Party (PCI) members formed the backbone of the partisan movement. Using all the prestige which its associations with Russia still gave it amongst the proletariat, the Italian Communist Party quickly gathered a mass working class membership and used its influence to channel workers' anger against the war and their longing for a better world into a fight for a "democratic Italy". In other words, the class struggle was to be put at the service of the Allied imperialism and help the Italian bourgeoisie to salvage more than it otherwise could have expected from the war.\*

Inside the working class there was only one organised voice of opposition to all this and that came from the Internationalist Communist Party (PCInt.) whose leaflet we are publishing here. The PCInt. had hastily come into being in 1943 under the inspiration of revolutionaries such as Onorato Damen and Bruno Maffi who had been expelled from the old Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I) for their part in the fight to resist the process of so-called bolshevisation of the Party from the mid-Twenties. The PCInt. recognised from the start that Russia had become an imperialist power in its own right and recognised that it had the difficult task of explaining to workers that it was no gain for them to be told that Italy was now on the same side as Russia. Though the leaflet here refers to the Italian Socialist Party and the PCI as the "two workers' parties" (by virtue of their membership and political claims) the PCInt., as is clear in the text, was well aware that these parties were no friends of the working class. On the contrary, in the lone battle to persuade workers (not only in Italy) that

the only war worth fighting is the revolutionary war to destroy capitalist society (not rebuild it) and for the construction of a classless society these parties, the PSI and especially the PCI were recognised by the internationalists as dangerous enemies.

Ultimately the power of democratic anti-fascist ideology, particularly when pedalled by supposedly workers' parties, and then later the material support of Marshall Aid from the US to bankrupt states were enough to save capitalism from a repeat of the revolutionary insurrections which had bedevilled the European powers at the end of the 1st World War. This, however, is the wisdom of hindsight. In any case, the internationalists of the Communist Left had no alternative but to organise for a revolutionary struggle. Communists cannot choose the circumstances in which they fight. The leaflet below, the second of a series we are publishing from the early days of our sister organisation, the PCInt. (*Battaglia Comunista*) is testimony to the urgency of the situation in the Italy of 1944.

\* See 'Fifty Years Since the Clandestine Publication of *Prometeo* in Italy' in *Workers Voice* 70 for more about the democratic goals of Togliatti's newly formed 'Communist Party' 1944.

Read

Quaderni

di Battaglia Comunista 6

**Il processo di formazione e la nascita del Partito comunista internazionalista.**

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# Long Live Proletarian Revolution!

**Workers, Peasants, Soldiers!**

After four years of war the result of the most fearsome massacre in history is unfolding in front of you in all its horror. Like a gigantic steamroller, the war has passed over and over again into every corner of Europe, destroying what entire generations of workers have built. And to support this war, the bourgeoisie has mobilised those gigantic riches which it so carefully hoarded when you were asking for bread, it has sacrificed that civilisation over which it shed so many bitter tears when the spectre of revolution disturbed its dreams, it has blessed the violence which excited the hypocritical disdain of its moralists when the proletariat threatened to use it, in a rather different spirit and in rather different measure, to defend with its rights the rights of the whole of society. It has resorted to everything to preserve class privilege: it has appealed to the most refined resources of an intelligence which seemed so poor in the rather more fruitful task of securing for you the conditions for a human life; it has played with diabolical refinement on the most bestial instincts, on the darkest racial and national hatreds and on the perversion of the noblest sentiments; it has invoked the protection of a God ready to bless the cannons of all the armies; it has not hesitated, in legitimising the carnage, to wave those banners which in peacetime fill the honest bourgeois with dismay - liberty, social justice. socialism...

And meanwhile, when the war is about to end, you glimpse the outlines of the peace you have been promised as your liberator and the vindicator of all your rights. You see the same bloody "peace" that you tasted under the flags of the Axis in the territories under German "protection", mapping itself out in another form in the countries that the Allied armies are rapidly "liberating". You see how the imperialist appetites slug it out over this or that scrap of earth and then they reconcile their differences when they face you - defeated populations, who were dragged into the conflict not by their will but by the insatiable greed of the ruling class, reduced to the tools of the victors; see how the armistices heap cuts and reparations on already exhausted nations; see

the even sharper resurgence of those nationalist ideologies against which they pretended they were fighting, and the transformation of the armies into guardians of "order" - an order that can only be threatened by our class's construction of a more worthwhile society with socialism.

**Workers, peasants, soldiers!**

Many of you believed that this war was your war. Weren't you promised by both sides that the fruits of the victory would be yours? Today - after having proven the tenacity of the nazi bastion and the ferocity of fascism rebaptised as social republicanism - you know to whom the fruits go. To tie you to the war and its immediate and future events, two workers' parties have divided the responsibility with the class enemy for the war itself and for power. "Together we must fight fascism", they declared while putting proletarian forces at the disposal of bourgeois democracy, as if there could ever be an enemy common to the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and as if it could be valid to entrust to a bourgeois fraction the task of eradicating for ever a plague that has its origins in the class domination of the bourgeoisie itself.

You have seen parties who boast of being the heirs of two Internationals preach, instead of the class struggle, the hunting down of Germans, national union, the ideology of the fatherland; you see them making an instrument of war of the workers and peasants organised into the partisans, rather than the army of the revolution, pushing you towards individual terrorism while the repressive apparatus is still able to "demand its martyrs" with the massacre of twenty times as many of your brothers. You see them prepare, as in Warsaw and Paris, the proletarian insurrection not to win you political power but to smooth the way for the triumphant entry of the armies, and to permit the nazi-fascist beast, as its last service to capitalism while it suffers its death throes, to exercise one more time its much-loved trade of executioner of the proletariat. Finally, you see them, at the very moment when the decline of the war opens infinite possibilities for your combative energies, accept collaboration with the bourgeois parties

for ... the restoration of peace!

**Workers, peasants, soldiers!**

The imminent collapse of the hated totalitarian regimes and the now near end of the war signals the beginning of a period of crisis in bourgeois society and great social agitation. The bourgeoisie can, with the support of the social-centrists, win the war; but can they win the peace? Will it dominate its forces in a post-war period of hunger and misery, with a state apparatus in decomposition, with war-weary armies open to the revolutionary contagion, with popular masses who rightly expect the satisfaction of the promises around which the war propaganda was built? Thus, in the rapid ripening of gigantic social conflict, the proletarian vanguard could pull into the whirlwind of the revolution all the lesser classes which the war has proletarianised. And this is precisely the choice: either a new bourgeois era, the forerunner of new and even more fearsome conflict, or, with your revolution, socialism.

But, for this to happen, so that your forces are not once again destroyed to the advantage of the ruling class, it is necessary that the struggle without quarter against the war, to which we have never tired from calling you, be widened into a civil war; that, against the sick ideology that pits nation against nation, there arises in you the consciousness of the fundamental antagonism which opposes class and class. The proletariat must take the high road to the conquest of power, around a party which is not afraid to lead the way; and that, finally, there is the re-establishment, across borders, between proletarians of all countries, of those links of revolutionary solidarity which a long period of opportunism and warmongering propaganda, and five years of conflict have fatally ruptured.

For this we turn to you, and through you to the workers labouring abroad, and to the very proletarians who wear, in your midst, the hated uniform of Nazi militarism, and to those who will come with the hated uniform of Anglo-Saxon or Russian militarism to defend the "new order", so that you do not surrender yourselves

to capitalism's game and pursue the fantasies of a "war of liberation" or of "progressive democracy", or yield to the enticements of a prodemocracy insurrection, and, instead, you turn all your forces towards the only goal which your class consciousness gives you: the revolutionary conquest of power. On this hard road, firmly united in the mass organs which will be born from the pains of your struggle, liberated from the heavy chain of compromise, guided by a revolutionary party to which you will give the inestimable support of your healthiest energies, there is a whole world to destroy - the old world of your servitude in which you have been massacred - and a whole new world to build.

**Workers, peasants, soldiers!**

The edifice of the old capitalist society is shaking. Those who invite you to fight for a democracy which can only be brought about by proletarian revolution are helping this society to recover; those who invite you to fight not only for the overthrow of fascism but also for the revolutionary conquest of power will give it a death blow. Choose! A hard struggle awaits the proletariat. It is a question of building the ideological and practical revolutionary framework that fifteen years of mistakes and betrayals have broken, of retaking the road dripping with proletarian blood of the October Revolution. But this struggle is what the Italian and world proletariat must courageously confront, if they want to be victorious.

Imperialist war cannot be defeated except by proletarian revolution: only the revolutionary conquest of power can win true peace, the peace of a society without classes. This is your banner: fall in behind it!

**For the international unity of the proletariat! For the destruction of capitalist society and the revolutionary conquest of power! Against bourgeois war, against capitalism's peace, long live proletarian revolution!**



# August 1914 - When Social Democracy went to war

This summer marks the 80th anniversary of a major turning point in the history of working class politics. In August 1914 the Second International collapsed. Headed by the German SPD the parties of the International supported their local bourgeoisies at the outbreak of the First World War. That decision marked the permanent and irrevocable end to Social Democracy's role as a tool for proletarian revolutionists. How did it happen and what was the response from the revolutionary minority within Social Democracy at the time?

## 80 years of service to imperialism

In many advanced capitalist countries, and in a whole number within imperialism's periphery, Social Democratic parties are a more-or-less fixed part of the bourgeois regime. Particularly within Western Europe, parties affiliated to the "Socialist International" either form the government or act as the loyal parliamentary opposition. Parties such as the German SPD or the British Labour Party have played one or other of those roles continuously since the establishment of the post-1945 imperialist order. In Spain the bourgeoisie breathed life into the PSOE to maintain democratic capitalist rule after the end of the Francoist regime. Similar attempts were, and are being, made in the former Soviet empire.

The role of Social Democracy as a pillar of the bourgeois order, in fact, stretches back beyond the Second World War (during which the British Labour Party was invited into the Coalition Government to help run the imperialist slaughter). Throughout the 1920s and 30s the Social Democrats played a key role in the various European democracies. Prime examples were the Labour Governments in Britain and the role of the Social Democrats during the German Weimar Republic, where the Social Democrats had earned the trust of the ruling-class by organising the bloody defeat of the revolutionary workers' movement in 1919. Other variants were the Popular Fronts in France and Spain during the 1930s. In the latter cases the Social Democrats were participants in the bourgeois democratic coalitions which also included the local Stalinist representatives, fraudulently using the title "Communist" Parties.

Social Democracy has been one of the main tools by which the ruling-class has maintained their dominance since the end of the first World War. Their ability and willingness to play that role was established during that war when the four year bloodbath gave the Social Democrats a lengthy baptism in the bourgeois order. However all baptisms are preceded by a birth - Social Democracy as a tool of imperialism had been born in August 1914. More accurately, for proletarian revolutionists whether in 1914 or 1994, Social Democracy as a proletarian formation died in that month to be reborn as a fully fledged tendency of the bourgeoisie.

## Second International (1889-1914)

The Second International was founded to mark the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution and to provide an international forum for socialists which had not existed since the collapse of the International Workingmen's Association (the First International) in 1872. Throughout its

history its formalistic use of Marxist terminology and commitment to class struggle and revolution mixed uneasily with the day-to-day theory and practice within its main national sections.

From its early days bourgeois and petit-bourgeois influence could be detected within the International. These counter-revolutionary and fundamentally anti-marxist tendencies were evident in both the writings and actions of Second Internationalists before the turn of the century.

In 1895 Friedrich Engels wrote an introduction



Russian soldiers in favour of the war, August 1914. Their banners read "In the name of freedom - War with Germanism until final victory" "Officer and Soldier as One" "Without Victory - No Freedom"

to Marx's writings on the 1848 revolution in France. In his document Engels dealt with the changes which had taken place since the book was written and considered the resultant strategic changes which the proletarian movement would need to carry out a successful struggle against the social, political and military strength of the bourgeois state machine. The SPD executive, fearful of increased state repression, edited the document to remove its revolutionary element and to present the question of social revolution as a question of gradualism and mass education.

The attack on the revolutionary kernel of Marxist theory was codified and developed by Eduard Bernstein, a leading German Social Democrat, after Engel's death. Bernstein wrote a series of articles on "Problems of Socialism" in the journal *Neue Zeit* in 1896 to 1898. These articles, marked the theoretical foundation of the "revisionist" attempts to transform Marxism into a petit-bourgeois democratic political practice based on gradualism and reformism - in Bernstein's own words,

*The final aim of socialism, whatever it may be, means nothing to me; it is the movement itself which is everything.*

The concrete implications of Bernstein's revisionism were soon translated into political practice by the French Social Democracy. In 1899 the socialist Alexandre Millerand took a ministerial position in the French government alongside representatives of bourgeois order such General Gallifet, butcher of the Paris Commune. This entry into government by a Social Democrat was welcomed, or at the very least condoned, by all those who were beginning to express socialism as a gradualist process more concerned with parliamentary power than class struggle.

The growing influence of revisionism can be tracked throughout the remaining years of the International. For example, by 1904 Socialists

in the Landtag of Baden (a state in South Germany) were forming a coalition Government with Liberals - the logical outcome of voting for capitalist budgets which South German Social Democrats had done as early as 1891.

The response of the International to these expressions of revisionism is instructive. Decisions, up to and including the question of taking part in bourgeois governments were deemed to be tactical questions. As such, national sections were left free to make their own decisions. The International therefore allowed the practice of revisionism to develop at its own pace

wherever it could establish itself.

The failure of the International's executive bodies to act as an organising centre was a failing which by allowed each national section to adapt their own theory and practice to that of their own national conditions i.e. their local bourgeois order. This in turn led to an erosion of proletarian nationalism in favour of various national deviations. The culmination of that process was only to become fully apparent in 1914.

## Resistance to Revisionism

The development of revisionism did not go unchallenged. Within the German SPD Marxists such as Franz Mehring, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg continued to counterpose revolutionary Marxism to petit-bourgeois democracy. In 1899 Luxemburg replied to Bernstein in the clearest terms -

*.... opportunist practice is essentially irreconcilable with Marxism. .... also opportunism is incompatible with socialism (the socialist movement) in general, .... its internal tendency is to push the labour movement into bourgeois paths, .... opportunism tends to paralyse completely the proletarian class struggle.*

Elsewhere within Social Democracy, Lenin carried out prolonged and consistent resistance to revisionism amongst the Russian Social Democrats. In 1908, commenting on Marxism and revisionism Lenin wrote prophetically -

*What we now frequently experience only in the domain of ideology, namely, disputes over theoretical amendments to Marx; what now crops up in practice .... as tactical differences with the revisionists .... will make it necessary in the heat of the fight to distinguish enemies from friends, and to cast out bad allies in order to deal decisive blows at the enemy. The ideological struggle*

*waged by revolutionary Marxism against revisionism at the end of the nineteenth century is but the prelude to the great revolutionary battles of the proletariat, which is marching forward .... despite all the waverings and weaknesses of the petty bourgeoisie.*

## Imperialism and resolutions against war

By the end of the 19th century capitalism had entered its imperialist phase. New sources for raw materials and markets for surplus capital were being carved out across the globe and each of the imperialist powers were scrambling to defend their own interests.

On at least two occasions the European powers had nearly stumbled into war as a result of conflicting colonial interests in Africa. In 1904 the Russo-Japanese war was to contribute to the crisis of Tsarism and the revolutionary upsurge of 1905. In the face of the growing threat of war the International passed anti-war resolutions. In a Congress in Stuttgart in 1907 the organisation passed a resolution drafted by Luxemburg which declared,

*In the event of war threatening to break out, it is the duty of the workers and their parliamentary representatives in the countries involved to do everything possible to prevent the outbreak of war .... Should war break out nevertheless, it is their duty to advocate its speedy end and to utilise the economic and political crisis brought about by the war to rouse the various social strata and to hasten the overthrow of capitalist class rule.*

Broadly similar resolutions were also passed at congresses in Copenhagen (1910) and Basle (1912).

## July 1914 - the Third Balkan War ?

In 1912-13 two wars had been fought in the Balkans as the various local states, egged on by one or other of the more powerful European states, had fought over the spoils of the declining Turkish Empire.

When the Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by a Serbian nationalist in Sarajevo on June 28th 1914 it was not immediately clear that a World War would ensue. During the next few days and weeks the sections of the International published statements in line with the resolutions of the International Congresses.

As late as July 28th, *Vorwärts*, the main paper of the German SPD, printed the following rhetorical question and answer -

*How shall the German proletariat act in the face of such a senseless paroxysm. The German proletariat is not in the least interested in the preservation of the Austrian national chaos.*

On 25th July Austro-Hungary declared war on Serbia. The respective responses of the Marxist minority and the revisionist majority are graphically shown by the responses of the Second Internationalists in the two countries. The response of two Serbian Socialist deputies, Ljapchevitch and Katzlerovitch, is powerfully recorded by Leon Trotsky in an article published in November 1914.



*In the Skuptchina, in an atmosphere of indescribable national enthusiasm, a vote was taken on the war credits. The voting was by roll-call. Two hundred members had answered "Yes". Then in a moment of deathlike silence came the voice of the Socialist Ljaptchevitch - "No". Every one felt the moral force of this protest, and the scene has remained indelibly impressed upon my memory.*

In contrast to the principled bravery of their comrades in Serbia the leading elements of Austrian Social Democracy had already collapsed. A meeting of the International was held in Brussels on July 29th and 30th. Austrian Social Democrat, Victor Adler, later recalled his contribution.

*The war is already upon us.Up to now we have fought against war as well as we could. The workers also did their utmost against the war intrigues. But don't expect any further action from us. We are in a state of war. Our press is censored. We have a state of emergency and martial law as a back-drop. - I did not come here to address a public meeting , but to tell you the truth, that when hundreds of thousands are already marching to the borders and martial law holds sway at home, no action is possible here.*

Following the meeting the International hosted a mass rally against the war in Brussels. According to Paul Frolich's biography of Luxemburg the rally filled the "Cirque Royal" to capacity.

August 1914

In the few days following the meeting in Brussels

two historical processes converged with an incredible speed. Firstly, the logic of imperialist rivalry and the sets of alliances which had evolved around it arrived at its logical and fatal conclusion. Austria-Hungary and Russia both fully mobilised on July 31st. On August 1st, Germany declared war on Russia - on the 3rd on France. On the 4th Britain declared war on Germany.

The second historic factor, in fact intimately linked to the effects of imperialism within the metropolitan countries, was the outcome of decades of creeping revisionism and parliamentarianism. The parliamentary deputies of the German SPD, the "jewel in the crown" of the International met on August 3rd to decide their stand on the forthcoming vote on war credits. Frolich described the historic decision.

*Out of 111 deputies only 15, including Liebknecht, Haase, Ledebour, Ruhle and Lensch, called for a 'no' vote. Their demand for special permission to register their minority vote was refused. On 4 August the parliamentary membership closed ranks to vote in favour of the war credits. Even Karl Liebknecht bowed to party discipline.*

The revolutionary response

When the SPD deputies voted for war credits on August 4th the International died as a force which could in any way serve the proletariat. The vast majority of Second Internationalists immediately sided with their own bourgeoisies just as the SPD had.

The collapse was a thunderbolt even to the Marxists in the International who had resisted the moves towards revisionism. It is well known that Lenin thought that the edition of *Vorwarts* describing the vote was a forgery. The Rumanian

socialists also thought the news was a lie.

Amongst the Second Internationalists only a small minority were initially able to withstand the waves of national chauvinism which swept across Europe. Apart from the Serbian Socialists, mentioned above, the two other main groups were the Russian Bolsheviks and the Bulgarian Tesnyaki (meaning Narrow) faction.

Those who had carried out the most thoroughgoing fight against revisionism were best placed to analyse the collapse of the International and carry forward the struggle for revolutionary internationalism.

On the night of the 4th August a group of German Marxists including Luxemburg, Mehring and Marchlewski-Karski met to oppose the war and the SPD's support for it. In Trotsky's articles, printed in the Russian emigre paper *Golos* (The Voice) in November 1914 he wrote;

*We revolutionary Marxists have no cause for despair. The epoch into which we are now entering will be our epoch. Marxism is not defeated. On the contrary: the roar of the cannon in every corner of Europe heralds the theoretical victory of Marxism. What is left now of the hopes for a "peaceful" development , for a mitigation of capitalist class contrasts, for a regular systematic growth into Socialism ? Socialist reformism has actually turned into Socialist imperialism.*

Even more incisively Lenin, writing in October 1914 (published in *Sotsial Demokrat*, of November 1st), declared;

attention, almost a dozen years afterthe Commune to the dangers facing his class if it did not deal with "the social question", whilst, at the same time, condemning any attempt by the working class to organise themselves. but the film does not even have this coherent purpose.

Instead it's over- zealous mirroring of the letter of the novel ends to produce a rather wooden, abstract quality, in effect creating a documentary rather than a historical realism. Despite the fallacies of Zola's 'organicist' method - society was likened to the human body, so that a cure for the disease to its 'harmonious unity' became a struggle against capitalism's 'undesirable features' - he was under no illusions that he was depicting anything other than a a life and death class struggle. Berri, the film's director, echoing the ideological sanctity of the contemporary bourgeoisie, adulterates this in the language of a sentimental humanism, as banal as it is ahistorical. Accordingly (we are told) *Germinal's* appeal lies in the " universal and timeless nature of the story", " the problem of rich and poor as eternal and universal", ie.. class society will last forever and cannot be fundamentally changed: "contemporary man needs knowledge of his past " and so on, and because all the leading actors came back from sending food packages to Rumania and Rwanda, you are expected to sit back and swallow this purgative for your troubled consciousness.

Filmed in Lille, a region once home to French coal mining, the film boasts, to quote its advertising parlance, its "production values". Unemployed miners were used as 'extras' to give it 'authenticity'. Such is "drama as history" - a post-modern epitaph for all our comrades who fell in the coalfield - a gloss, a series of images on a screen. And so we have highly sublime message for Berri & Co. - when history becomes drama "this is where we come in!"

AS

*The collapse of the Second International is the collapse of opportunism .... The opportunists have long been preparing the ground for this collapse by denying the socialist revolution and substituting bourgeois reformism.*

Lenin concluded with a call for a new International - "Long live a proletarian International, freed from opportunism".

From August 4th, 1914 revolutionaries had two tasks - to turn the imperialist war into civil war and to build a new International of proletarian Internationalists. By October 1917 those who had held to that perspective were able to herald the Russian Revolution as the first step towards the world revolution.

Unlike the latter-day revisionists who drive workers time and again back into the arms of bourgeois social democracy, today's internationalist communists continue to stand in the tradition of 1914's revolutionary minorities.

KT

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# Germinal

a review of the film

director: claude berri

*Men were springing up, a black avenging host was slowly germinating in the furrows, thrusting upwards for the harvest of future ages. And very soon this germination would crackthe earth asunder.*  
Zola (end of *Germinal*).



Based on the novel by Emile Zola, *Germinal* is set in the fictional town of Montsou, northern France, and is loosely based on two miners' strikes of 1869 which involved battles between miners and troops. These were flashpoints on the road that led to the first great assault to effectively shake bourgeois rule in not just in France but throughout Europe - the Paris Commune of 1871.

The hardships and deprivations of the miners everyday lives are embodied in the Maheu family, the nine of whom all live and sleep in the one room. Everyone of them over the age of ten is forced to face the suffocating dangers of the mines for pittances barely enough to keep them alive. As with today, a recession requires the bosses to cut even these meagre wages and this proves to be the final straw for the miners, who launch a strike for the material salvation of their humanity.

This spontaneous revolt against the all powerful patriarchal owners, who have their workforce subject to vitually feudal conditions, leads not only to violent struggle against the state, but also against passive fellow proletarians, as all kinds of internecine divisions open up in a civil strife splitting miners from allied industries, miners against miners, family against family. A profound resentment simmering beneath the surface for years erupts into uncontainable explosions of brutal class violence.

Facing an enemy much better prepared and with

tons of coal in stockpile, politically and organisationally, the strike is doomed from the outset. Despite an heroic and prolonged resistance, the strikers are starved, bludgeoned, demoralised into submission. Parallels with the British Miners' Strike of 84/85, despite a gap of over a century, are stark and can in no way be accidental. The failure of the miners to generalise the strike, to break out of the union strait-jacket towards an autonomous self-organisation led to isolation and defeat.

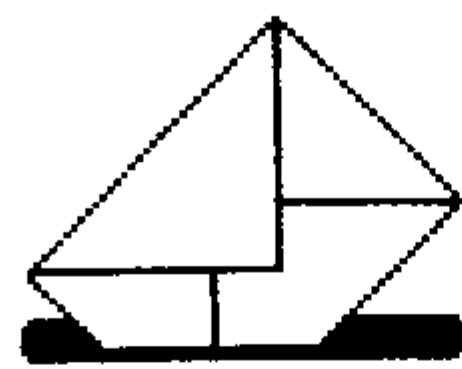
Zola engaged in a painstaking effort of research for the book and this is reflected in the graphic detail brought to life for our sensuous consumption. In a visual sense, possibly as convincing a portrayal of early capitalism to be committed to the screen, *Germinal* is a significant film as much as for what it omits to say, as much for its failure as for its success.

A predictable question of the bourgeois critic - does the film remain faithful to the book, to the original work? This interests us only on the level of form. A more comprehensive question would be: does either adequately grasp the human significance of the concrete events in a way that truthfully preserves them as a moment in the overall historical process of class relations in struggle? In other words: is *Germinal* political art for the proletariat or merely a piece of sumptuous realism whose subject matter is quite incidental? Zola wrote *Germinal* as a warning to the corrupt bourgeoisie of the French Third Republic in the 1880s. He was trying to draw



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# Letters to the Editor



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

## Can the Unions be turned into effective fighting organisations for the working class?

Dear *Workers Voice*

I read with interest in your issue 69 (Nov/Dec 1993) that you welcome letters (however critical) concerning articles in previous issues. Your paper shows how much importance you correctly attach to the need for greater clarity in questions relating to the struggle of the working class.

In your article *Class Struggle for a New Society* (issue 69) you correctly stress the importance of the class struggle in defending the working class from attacks (by the capitalist class) on its standard of living and that the cuts in the NHS and in housing by the (capitalist!) state are basically for economic reasons (i.e. to increase the profits of the capitalist class).

However, you criticise the **trade unions** for making the workers' struggle more difficult. Surely you mean the **trade union bureaucracy!**

The trade unions were founded by workers as fighting organisations - fighting organisations for the interests of the working class against the capitalist class. It is the trade union bureaucracy which has turned the trade unions into what they are today - instruments of the workers' bureaucracy and workers' aristocracy to sponge on the fighting power of the workers in the interests of the workers' bureaucracy and workers' aristocracy - and in effect in the interests of the bourgeoisie. The trade union bureaucracy helps the bourgeoisie against the workers. It keeps the workers from fighting seriously by lulling them, by deceiving them and by sabotaging as far as possible any serious struggle by workers. In order to pacify the workers and yet not lose their support the trade union bureaucracy tries to ensure that the capitalists make small concessions e.g. small rises in money wages.

At present the trade unions are dominated by the trade union bureaucracy. Workers must fight to turn the trade unions into what they once were - effective fighting organisations for the interests of the working class against the capitalist class. To do this workers must fight to get rid of the treacherous trade union bureaucrats and restore workers' democracy in the trade unions - so that, for example, elected representatives and officials of these trade unions can be deposed and replaced **at any time** by the workers who elected them.

You correctly stress that the Labour party (this instrument of the labour bureaucracy - especially of the trade union bureaucracy - and of the labour aristocracy) defends the interests of the capitalist class. It does this on behalf of the workers' bureaucracy and workers' aristocracy in return for well-paid jobs, honours (see Lord Wilson and Lord Callaghan!) and privileges of various kinds at the expense of the mass of the working class. This equally applies to the SPs in other countries and any remnants of the CPs. You therefore correctly state that the international working class has no political organisation it can call its own (i.e. it has no **genuine workers' party**). This party would lead the workers in the class struggle against all sections of the bourgeoisie. It would fight for the class interests of the working class and on this basis for its daily interests against all forms of capitalist exploitation, for higher wages, better working conditions etc.

Workers need such a genuine workers' party and surely the first step for the workers must therefore be to **break with the false "workers" parties**, i.e. the LPs (SPs) and the CPs, and help build

a **genuine workers' party** which must be a party of workers' democracy i.e. one in which it is not the party officials but the workers in the party who decide and control its policies and actions.

I look forward to seeing this letter and your comments on it in one of your next issues.

BJ

## Our Reply

Dear comrade

Thank you for your letter which arrived just too late to make the last issue of *Workers Voice*. However, it is particularly welcome since you have very clearly re-stated a 'classical' Left-wing critique of the trades unions and it gives us an opportunity to explain how we differ.

No, when we say that the trades unions act against the interests of the working class we don't only mean the bureaucracy. We are referring to the very nature of trade unionism, to trades unions as such. In our view the absence of "effective fighting organisations for the interests of the working class against the capitalist class" cannot be explained simply in terms of "treacherous" union leaders, nor can the problem be remedied by rank and file workers devoting their energy to democratising the existing unions (or creating new ones). Let us explain.

In the first place we have to ask ourselves what we mean by 'fighting organisations', 'the interests of the working class', 'workers aristocracy', etc. It's easy to use these terms as part of a stock argument about why the working class is in the position it is today but as a convincing explanation to anyone who is seriously trying to understand the problem we have to delve a bit further. If we can broadly say that unions were founded by workers as "fighting organisations" as a matter of historical fact we must also add that they were conceived as organs of **self-defence within capitalism**. The early craft unions, remnants of the guild system, in particular were concerned to protect wages by controlling and restricting entrance to their trade, with building up sickness and pension funds and so on more than in militant strike activity. Even with the appearance of more militant industrial unions (with funds exclusively devoted to strike pay such as the miners and railway workers' unions) and the new unionism of the previously unorganised unskilled towards the end of the nineteenth century, the trades unions were still essentially what Marx had described them in 1865: "centres of resistance against the encroachments of capital". To that extent Marx recognised that they "worked well" and were useful weapons for the working class. However, he also realised that as weapons against the capitalist system they failed by "limiting themselves to a guerilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using their organised forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class, that is to say, the ultimate abolition of the wages system." (From *Wages, Price and Profit*.) In our view the reason for this is not that the unions became bureaucratised or that for some reason the union leaders continuously betrayed their members. These are effects rather than the cause of the fact that trades unions are an intrinsic part of the capital/wage labour relationship. Their existence is bound up with the existence of capitalism itself. Without capitalism there would be no need to negotiate terms for the sale of labour power; there would be no need for the unions. At bottom this is why

the trades unions never have been, and what's more never can be, revolutionary weapons of the working class. If this is what is meant by "effective fighting organisations for the interests of the working class against the capitalist class" we would say it is impossible to try and turn the trades unions into what they never were - i.e. organs of revolutionary struggle.

On the other hand, if you mean that in the past the trades unions acted effectively as self-defence organisations of the working class, limiting in Marx's words "the encroachments of capital", we can only agree. The fact that today they no longer do this (although they pretend to do so) is not because the unions have become bureaucratic as they have become an accepted part of the capitalist system but because the historical situation is different today. In the days when capitalism was still establishing itself and consolidating its domination over the world - i.e. when it was laying down the material foundations which for the first time in history made the creation of a world communist society a **realistic possibility** and not just a utopian dream - the trades unions played an invaluable part in the development of the potential gravediggers of capitalism, the working class. Above all else, by organising resistance on a collective basis, the trades unions helped workers to see themselves as part of a class and to recognise that therein lay their strength. At the end of the day, however, the unions are a part of capitalism and thus the assumption of the trade unionist (whether a bureaucratic leader or not) is that in times of economic crisis a satisfactory compromise can be worked out for both the bosses and the workers; at times when the national capital is under threat the trades unions rush to its defence. This was first clearly demonstrated in 1914 when the trades unions, far from resisting British workers being sent off to kill their fellow European workers in the interests of imperialism, co-operated fully in the recruitment process. By putting nation before class in 1914 the unions had revealed themselves as agents for the conservation of capitalism. Instead of a threat to its existence they became possible tools for capital to use to safeguard itself and all the more effective because the unions could rely on their reputation as workers' organisations. Henceforward the trades unions have been tolerated by capital to the extent that they have been useful to it. In the early days of the present capitalist crisis - between 1974-79 there was a sharp resistance from the working class which the trades unions found difficulty in controlling. Unions who can't control their members are not much use to capital and it is no accident that the unions came under attack from the Conservative government but not before certain crucial class battles had been fought (and lost) on the sectional and safe grounds of trade unionism. First the steel workers and then the coal miners fought the bitterest struggle of all - isolated and contained within the union formulae of defending their 'own' industries. The question of a united struggle of the whole working class against the capitalist class was not even posed. Instead the working class was demoralised and defeated section by section and without exception it was the unions who negotiated away the hundreds of thousands of jobs that were lost. Now the capitalist economic crisis is a stage further on and the attacks on the working class are of a different order. Instead of the head-on battles over job losses which was part of the initial process of increasing competitiveness and getting rid of the unprofitable and obsolete there is a process of capital renewal and restructuring which means a wholesale reorganisation of the working class and established patterns of work. Needless to say this involves even more attacks on wage labour: part-time, short-term precarious work in the name of 'flexibility' and 'efficiency'; even more redundancies for the sake of 'new technology' and 'profitability'; individual work contracts and ever-harsher productivity deals in the name of 'realism' and the 'present economic climate'. Today it is increasingly obvious that the trades unions are doing nothing at all to resist the encroachments of capital. On the contrary, they are still the prime means used by the bosses to get workers to accept the situation. Moreover, in contrast to their earlier role in history, the unions - by accepting things

like individual work contracts - are aiding and abetting the bosses in undermining workers' sense of class identity. In short, the trades unions today are an arm of capital in the workplace. This is not because they are bureaucratic or undemocratic (which they are) but because the essence of trade unionism is to try and find a compromise between capital and labour which will enable capital to remain 'competitive'. In present circumstances, where crisis-ridden capital has no alternative but to continue its attacks and squeeze more and more surplus value out of workers, this can only mean accepting the need for more cuts and sacrifices by the working class. This would happen no matter how democratic and unbureaucratic the trade union. It is a mistake to see the trades union and Labour leaders as simply corrupt members of the working class 'aristocracy'. At the top of the hierarchy these are people who have used the unions or the Labour Party to get into the capitalist class and who use these bodies to act in the interests of their class.

This is not to say that every member of a trade union has gone over to the capitalist class. Nor are we trying to say that every shop steward is a capitalist. What we are saying is that it is the **function** of the unions which has turned them into servants of capital, irrespective of the intentions of the most honest steward on the shop floor. Whereas you would like to see a fight to democratise the unions and take them out of the hands of the so-called labour aristocracy we say that any organisation today setting itself up as a permanent body to negotiate wages and working conditions can only end up acting in the interests of the bosses because they are not kidding when they say they have no alternative but to make a few workers redundant, introduce 'flexible' work practices etc. If you accept the capitalist logic (which is that of the trade unions) that an equitable solution can be found instead of rejecting the whole problem as one for the bosses and nothing to do with the working class then the question of an out and out battle where the working class fights unreservedly for its own interests will never be posed.

Now we are getting to the nub of the issue which is political. Although we would not pose it in the same way, you are right to link the question of workers putting up a genuine fight in their own interest to the question of the political party. Given that in today's circumstances compromises on the economic or trade union ground can only lead to defeat, what is the interest of the working class? In our view the working class today has no other interest than to struggle for a communist alternative to the present rotten society. Obviously this will not come about overnight. Part of the political preparation for this will be the formation of an internationalist party which can put forward the revolutionary programme in terms understandable to the working class as a whole. Before that can happen though revolutionary militants in the workplace have the job of exposing the real role of the trades unions to their colleagues and workmates. In the present situation their aim is not so much to fight for higher wages and better working conditions as to get as unified and extensive a fight as possible to resist even further attacks by capital. Any material gains, we know, will be temporary. The real gains from such struggles will be in terms of workers' re-awakened self-confidence about how to organise; re-newed self-awareness as a class; and not least, in the general increase in political consciousness and the number of new sympathisers for the revolutionary cause and the revolutionary political organisation that the experience generates. Certainly this will involve some workers breaking with the Labour and other Leftist parties but we don't envisage a mass breakaway from these, mainly because the revolutionary party of tomorrow will be much more of a minority organisation of fully committed revolutionaries than the old Social Democratic and Labour Parties with their largely passive memberships. However, that is another issue which there is no space to deal with here.

Thanks again for writing and we too look forward to any further comments you have to make.

Revolutionary greetings  
ER, for the CWO.



# 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 Internazionalista** (*Battaglia Comunista*).

## 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!**

## Subscription rates

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## Appeal to Readers

Twenty 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 mentality.

## Publications

### The Platform of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

This is now available, in an updated version in English, French and Italian, and will shortly be translated into Spanish, German and Farsi. Each price £1.

### Internationalist Communist Review

is the central organs in English of the IBRP. Each individual issue is £1.50. Back issues are available. **ICR12** is the current issue and contains articles on:

**The Nature of the Working Class today**  
**The Rise of Hitler and Anti-Fascism**  
**The History of the Italian Left**  
**Imperialist War in Spain 1936-9**

### Internationalist Notes

in Farsi

### Prometeo

Theoretical journal of the Internationalist Communist Party (Italy)

### Battaglia Comunista

Monthly paper of the PCInt (Italy)

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

## Pamphlets

**South Africa - The Last 15 Years**  
(see panel opposite)

CWO Pamphlet No. 1  
**Economic Foundations of Capitalist Decadence £1**

CWO Pamphlet No. 2  
**Russia 1917 £2**

## Meetings

### Readers' Meetings

#### Sheffield

The Sheffield section of the CWO meets at 8.00 p.m. on every third Tuesday of the month (next meetings July 19th, Aug. 16th and Sept 20th) in Moseleys Arms, West Bar Green (opposite the Fire Museum). All welcome.

#### London

These will be held regularly in Conway Hall. Write to London address for details.

## There is no Electoral Road to Socialism

### A Report on Meetings with the Socialist Party

In May the CWO held two debates with the Socialist Party in London and Sheffield. Superficially there are some similarities between the two currents. We both reject the state capitalist ideas of the Trotskyist and Stalinist left that nationalisation represents anything other than a particular policy of capitalism. For both organisations socialism means the abolition of nations, the abolition of the capitalist law of value (which always operated in the old USSR), the abolition of money and with it the exploitation of wage labour. Ultimately socialism is about the abolition of the state and the establishment of a community of freely-associated producers on a world scale.

We would also agree that socialism cannot be introduced by decree or by the action of a small minority. But when we got to this issue the fragility of our agreement was quickly evident. In its basic statement of positions, *From capitalism to socialism ... How we live and how we could live*, the Socialist Party offers an adequate critique of capitalism coupled with a clear understanding of what socialism, as a finished product might be. What they cannot explain is the dynamic of how we leap from the one to the other. This issue was the nub of the debate. For the SP the long, slow process of propagandising for socialism with every individual proletarian until a majority wants socialism by voting for it in parliamentary elections is the only route to "revolution". We have to put the word in quotations marks because the SP's idea of "revolution" describes a process of legislative measures which outlaw the capitalist mode of production. Writing it like this seems to constitute a critique in itself but the CWO addressed itself to the task of underlining the utopian nature of the SP's vision as well as pointing out their basic lack of understanding of the entire history of the working class.

Space forbids an extended report of this discussion but we concentrated on pointing out that historically capitalism did not grant the working class the vote until it could guarantee the election results would not be anti-capitalist. We repeated Marx's views on class consciousness that the ruling ideas were everywhere those of the ruling class and that the idea that small socialist organisation could challenge capitalism's control of the media was simply absurd.

We also pointed out that even if the Socialists overcame all these obstacles then the bourgeoisie still had control of the state machine. they would not idly stand by whilst socialist support at the ballot box grew. Military intervention lurked behind every democratic failure of the ruling class. We pointed out how in Chile a regime

which the capitalist thought was socialist (the fact that it was not is irrelevant for the purposes of this argument) was overthrown in a bloodbath at the instigation of international imperialism in 1973 demonstrated just how committed the bourgeoisie were to defending their system of property.

Indeed the Socialist Party are more committed to bourgeois parliamentary democracy than the bourgeoisie. This means that ultimately their vision of socialism is a bourgeois one. Socialism demands more from the working class than just putting a cross in the right box on a ballot paper and then relying on the Socialist Party to pass laws outlawing capitalist forms. Socialism, as Luxemburg and Lenin constantly re-iterated can only be created by the conscious **actions** of millions of proletarians. It requires a different conception of what politics is. It is an activity involving every worker and not just something for a political elite. Consciousness is not acquired through education and propaganda (although these play their part in the formation of the most class conscious workers into a party before the revolution) but through active participation in a revolution. It is the process of revolutionary overthrow of the old order which creates a new vision of the world, a new consciousness. Once this is achieved then the working class can go on to build a socialist society. None of these arguments was seriously addressed by the SP members (most of whom had little to say on the real issues anyway).

None of this surprised us. The SP, founded as the Socialist Party of Great Britain in 1904, has always taken a passive and centrist position when faced with class issues. In the First World War they supported pacifism and rejected the idea of turning the imperialist war into a civil war. They rejected too the October revolution, preferring the bourgeois myth that it was simply a Bolshevik coup. They deliberately mislead their members about the fact that the Bolsheviks only posed the question of October in terms of international revolution in which Russia would be a small step and they repeat every bourgeois slander about the dictatorial intentions of the Bolsheviks. They say nothing about the fact that it was the Russian workers who showed us a different, a truly working class system of organising political power in mass society - the soviets. So attached is the SP to bourgeois forms that it simply ignores this great discovery. True, the Russian Revolution was isolated and did degenerate. True the Bolsheviks made mistakes about the nature of a socialist society. But all of these errors were committed as the revolution died in isolation (and from outside attack by international imperialism which cost 3 million workers' lives between 1918 and 1920). In this issue, as in the issue of socialism via parliament, the SP lines up alongside the capitalists.

This organisation which prides itself on its unchanging views since its social-democratic origins ninety years ago only confirmed in these debates that it has nothing to offer the proletariat today.

## New Bureau Pamphlets in French

### Approche a la question du Parti

### Le bordiguisme et la gauche italienne

### La conscience de classe dans la perspective marxiste

### Les origines du trotskysme

All 15FF(postage included) or £1,50 from the Sheffield address

### New Pamphlet in Farsi

**The Origins of Trotskyism £1.50**

## South Africa

### The Last Fifteen Years

This analytical chronicle of 22 articles from *Workers' Voice* is now a compendium available from the London address for £3.

The collection contains articles from *Workers' Voice* 72 *South African Elections - A Victory for Capitalism* through *Democracy and Proletarian Massacres* (WV69) and *ANC - Shield of South African Capitalism* (WV66) to *Mass Strikes in South Africa* (WV1) which was written in 1980.



# THE QUESTION OF CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

## Part 2 Overturning the Capitalist order

*The communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional property relations; no wonder that its development involves the most radical rupture with traditional ideas.*

### The Communist Manifesto

In Part 1 of this article in *Workers' Voice* 71, we saw how a materialist understanding of society explains the general domination of the working class by the ideology of the bourgeoisie. It is generally true that in all class societies the ideas of the ruling class dominate and yet society changes and the ruling classes are overthrown. How does this occur?

While the ideas of the ruling class are generally the ruling ideas in society it is obvious that their domination can never be total. The material reality of class society, with its inherent conflicts and insoluble contradictions is continually generating the basis for ideas which oppose those of the ruling class. While we are told of capitalism's wonderful virtues, such as efficiency, justice, harmony with human nature and so forth, we experience unemployment, deprivation, injustice and war. The material reality of capitalist society, however the bourgeoisie attempts to hide it, conflicts with the capitalist ideology they propound. This creates the basis for ideas in direct contradiction to the ideas of the bourgeoisie - for communist ideas. In general, however, the gaining of a communist understanding of the world, or communist consciousness is extremely difficult and under normal conditions of capitalist domination will only be achieved by a minority. Such ideas can only gain wider acceptance in periods of acute social crisis when capitalism's contradictions erupt in a direct way leading to massive struggles of the working class. A significant minority will only achieve communist consciousness through a whole series of battles and partial defeats in which the issues are ever more clearly posed. The practical struggle and comprehension of that struggle is what can produce a changed consciousness. As Marx wrote,

*The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice.*

### Theses on Feuerbach

The practical movement of revolution is the only force able to challenge the ideas of the bourgeoisie on a mass scale and produce wider communist, or class consciousness.

*Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.*

### The German Ideology

### The Development of Communist Consciousness

While the above provides the general philosophical framework in which the changing of ideas and conditions can be brought about we need now to consider the details of this process. As we explained in Part 1, although consciousness is derived from experience it is not a direct product of experience. The bourgeoisie is able

communist world view. Such a world view is necessarily a social and historical one which understands the social position of the working class, its historical evolution, the necessity for a higher form of society and the way to achieve this. As our comrades in the Internationalist Communist Party (Battaglia Comunista) put it

*Communist consciousness is the scientific reflection on the experiences of the class*



The struggle for communist consciousness. Factory committee elections, Putilov works, Petrograd 1918.

to structure this product with its own explanations and propaganda. In general consciousness arising from class struggle remains a form of bourgeois consciousness and the bourgeoisie succeeds, by means of its social democratic and leftist parties together with the trades unions in giving this struggle limited bourgeois goals. Communist consciousness will not therefore be automatically produced by the intensification of capitalism's contradictions nor even the beginnings of social breakdown. If this was the case the struggles of the working class, which have been going on for the last 200 years, would have produced communist consciousness and communism long ago. It is rather the case that, the contradictions of capitalism can cause society to start to break down while producing only a shift in the dominant ideology from that of the mainstream bourgeoisie to that of the petit bourgeoisie. More extreme forms of nationalism, racism, fascism or anti fascism, religious bigotry etc. have been produced by the crises of the inter war years and more recently in the 80's and 90's. This is evident in recent developments in countries such as Iran, Poland, the ex-Eastern Bloc countries, ex-Yugoslavia etc. These ideologies prepare the road for war, which is capitalism's temporary solution to its crisis, and is a means of defeating the class struggle. The spontaneous struggle of the working class on its own is no defence against these ideologies, as the wars this century and those going on now show, nor is it able to produce the consciousness needed to overthrow capitalism.

For the working class to become a "class for itself" that is, a class conscious of its own long term interests and future, a theoretical understanding of the historical movement of the class is required. Communist consciousness can only come about when the working class' experience of class and social conflict are structured and interpreted by a revolutionary

*and on the problems it poses, developed by those who have the means to undertake this reflection, and who identify themselves politically with the class.*

### Prometeo 1st semester 1978

The communist world view is not only an indirect product of experience but is the antithesis of capitalist ideology. It proposes to create a social system in direct contradiction to capitalist social relations. It is not based on the defence of any property relationships, but aims to sweep away all property relations and establish a form of society without classes in which property is social and work is for the satisfaction of human needs.

Although it is possible for individual workers to understand and accept elements of this world view such understanding is necessarily limited by the pressure of bourgeois ideology and is often short lived. The consciousness of the working class is a collective one and when struggle is advancing workers can experience this collectively, but when the struggle is defeated workers are individualised and consciousness reverts to bourgeois individualism. It is necessary for communist ideas to be developed to form a coherent whole and defended in a collective and organised way. It is within the political party of the working class that such a world view can be elaborated and developed. The party is the political expression of this world view. It is the repository of this consciousness.

A wider acceptance of the communist world view can only come about through the intervention of the political party in the struggles of the working class with this world view. The raw material produced by the class struggle must be interpreted and structured by the communist world view defended by the party. This means

a key role in the development of communist consciousness is played by the political party by returning to the class the lessons of its past experiences, explaining the need for communism and providing the programme for achieving it.

*It is the task of the proletarian political organisation to return to the working class the lessons of its own historical experience so that they become a material force in the emancipation of our class.*

### Platform of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

There can be no question of communist consciousness becoming widespread in the working class or of the success of the revolution if this does not occur.

### Historical Struggle for Communist Consciousness

The communist understanding which we have today has not arisen spontaneously from the struggles of the past. It has been distilled from those struggles by revolutionaries and survives in the political organisations of the working class. A few historical examples will illustrate this.

Although it is the struggle of the workers against capitalist exploitation which poses the question of an alternative society the real meaning of this struggle is abstracted from the events by revolutionaries. The lessons of the struggles of first half of the nineteenth century were clarified by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* which was a publication of the political group called the Communist League. Similarly the lessons of the 1848 revolutions and the Paris Commune were clarified by Marx in his writings on these events. The conclusions and analyses of Marx and Engels became known and could be returned to the working class by virtue of their being the publications and ideas of the political organisations which both men dedicated their lives towards creating.

Similarly, although it was the class struggle in Russia in 1905 which discovered the soviet form as the vehicle of workers democracy and power, it was the Bolsheviks who understood how this should be used. The spontaneous reaction of the soviets in 1917 was to support the liberal bourgeoisie, and it was the Bolsheviks, through their historical analyses and the intervention of the party, who won the majority of the soviets to the position that the soviets should take power for the working class. The degeneration of the Russian revolution and the establishment of state capitalism within Russia was similarly analyzed and clarified with the Italian left Communist movement in the 20s and 30s. These ideas were able to become a force with the creation of the Internationalist Communist Party in Italy in 1943 (see the article on p.3 of this issue).

Two further points need to be made, firstly the dynamic nature of consciousness and secondly the crucial role played by the political party in its development.

The struggles of the second half of the nineteenth century, in certain crucial ways, corrected certain issues in the *Communist Manifesto*. The most important being the need for the working class to destroy the bourgeois state rather than take it over. This was something noted by Marx and