
communist bulletin

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the miners strike

Plus articles on The Lebanon, Class Struggle in
Holland, and Correspondence on Organisation, the
PCInt. and the Left in Opposition.

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Contents

The Miners Strike in Britain.

Four articles dealing with this important struggle. Readers will note

The Miners Strike.....page 1.

An analysis of the buildup to the strike, the role of the NUM, the State, and the lessons for the whole working class of the strike.

The Miners Strike and the Role of Revolutionaries.....page 7.

How the fractions of the revolutionary milieu in Britain have responded to their responsibilities during the struggle.

The Miners Strike in Lancashire.....page 9.

A description by our comrades of Wildcat of their interventions at the coalfields of Northern England during the first months.

An Unhappy Intervention.....page 14.

The response of miners to a CBG leaflet in late August.

Four Leaflets of the CBG distributed during the Miners Strike.....page 15.

A Very Warm Autumn in Holland.....page 23.

An account from Echanges et Mouvement of class struggle in Holland.

Lebanon. Soft Spot on Western Bloc's Armour.....page 25.

An analysis of the situation in the Lebanon by TWAG.

Debate on the Question of the Organisation of Revolutionaries

A Response by the Tampa Workers Affinity Group to our text in Bulletin Two on the Organisation Question.....page 29.

Our Reply.....page 33..

The Italian Ideology.....page 36.

A former member of the CWO analyses the recently published Platform of the PCInt (Battaglia Comunista).

A Critique of the 'Left in Opposition' and Related Perspectives.....page 41.

L.L.M. follows up his text in International Review 34 with this analysis of the Consciousness of the Bourgeoisie.

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The Miners Strike

As we write the Miners' strike is in its sixth month having followed a nineteen week overtime ban. Coming as it does when workers struggles throughout the world have shown an upturn, the Miners' strike holds crucial lessons for workers on the current state of class struggle, the role of the unions, the preparation of the state and the role of revolutionaries. This article attempts to examine these lessons.

Thus over the past Forty years or so there has been a steady drop in numbers of pits and miners employed, from 700,000 miners in 958 pits at the time of nationalisation in 1947 to barely 200,000 miners in 200 pits today. But despite all this coal is still crucial to the capitalist State's economy as the various attempts to bail out production in recent years shows. Losses since 1974 have doubled



Militant Miners Confront Scabs in the Early Days of the Strike

Background to the Strike

Capitalist demand for coal is slumping. The current crisis now some sixteen years old, has hit production and as a result coal demand has dropped with consequent overproduction. The root cause of this crisis has been the increased productivity (or increase in the exploitation of workers), which is the keystone of capitalist production, as fewer workers employ greater amounts of capital investment to produce goods. Since only human labour gives these goods their value and since that labour component is dropping, less and less value is being created in relation to the massive amounts of capital being invested. This ever-present fall in the rate of profit is turning into an inevitable fall in the absolute profit - economic crisis is resulting. (For an excellent and lucid account of this process see Revolutionary Perspectives 2.) Blind to this, the bourgeoisie has been turning to nuclear power (hugely more capital intensive) both as part of their war preparations - creating enriched plutonium - and as a strategy to weaken the strength of the miners.

from £206.8 million to £485 million today. A further £500 million is being spent each year on new mines. For 1984-85, £1.1 billion is being set aside for the N.C.B. by the Treasury. These are losses the State has had to incur for the sake of ensuring its essential energy supplies. But now the pressures of the world crisis are such that further rationalisation of these energy supplies is necessary.

The government has decided that there will be a retrenchment and that in future the bulk of production will be in the Midlands with the biggest job losses hitting Scotland and South Wales. The fact that the state is being forced to ignore the social and political implications of closure in such areas in the face of the demands of the crisis marks the gravity of its situation, (a mirror image at a global scale of the I.M.F.'s position in South America).

This is "socially, economically and politically unacceptable to the N.U.M." (The Scotsman) The N.U.M.'s view of how best to further the interests of the British State, of which it is a part, sees this as short term thinking and, instead, it wants to maintain a large coal industry, even if in the short term this means excess capacity.

Labour Attacks the Miners.

For the past ten years the State's rationalisation plans have been determined by Eric Varley's Plan For Coal agreed on by the Labour Government, the National Union of Mineworkers and the National Coal Board which envisaged increased exploitation of miners, a swingeing closure programme and 42 million tons of new capacity. (This latter has almost been achieved - but at a crippling cost of £6 billion) Demand, however is now 20 to 25 million tonnes less than the Plan projected, due to the world economic crisis, and the provision for the phasing out of 'surplus capacity', despite the N.U.M.'s enthusiastic participation, has not been achieved as miners stubbornly resisted. The N.U.M. was a fully participating partner in these Plans of the various State factions, in a position of strength it had held since 1969 when the N.C.B.'s power-loading pay agreement handed the union a crucial weapon in its fight for a say in the State's planning of energy. In 1974 it was able to dragoon miners, who were participating in class-wide struggles at that time, behind the Labour Party which was more willing to allow the N.U.M. its say than the Heath Government which had attempted to impose its views on its bedfellow. 1974 saw the union at the height of its influence, but its strength was threatened by the very troops it had used to reach that position. If the N.U.M. had managed, as it intended, to control the miners, to limit the new flying pickets to the Power industry alone and to push for a Labour victory, the signs were clear that it was playing with fire. The unity and confidence of the British miners was something that could quite possibly escape its control if it sought to deflect the anger of its members. The N.U.M.'s solution was the 1978 Tony Benn productivity deal, forced through by the N.U.M. Executive DESPITE the fact that a national ballot of Miners

rejected it (something hushed up by the Bourgeois Media's current whining for a ballot). Bonus became a larger part of earnings, productivity (ie. exploitation) shot up 9% (20% at the coal face) and miners in the richer pits, such as Nottingham found themselves earning up to £100 a week more than miners in poorer areas such as Scotland. At a stroke the N.U.M. destroyed the miners' dangerous unity but still maintained their own tight hold over local enforcement of the deal.

In 1981, eager to present its credentials as the broker for continued exploitation of the miners to the new Thatcher government - and equally eager to control a spate of wildcat strikes - the union called a strike against government proposals to axe 23 pits - and won. Thatcher, learning from 1974, wasn't ready yet to impose her view on the union. Only one year later not 23 pits had closed, but 25.

The Tories Take Over.

Since 1981 Thatcher has been preparing for the inevitable showdown with the N.U.M. over who determines the future of the Coal Industry. Coal stocks have been built up to huge levels (and the closure plan slowed down to allow this to happen). By March 1983 she was ready. Macgregor was appointed N.C.B. Chairman as a deliberate act of provocation and closures were stepped up. Twelve pits were closed down in the last nine months of the year with 16,000 job losses compared with seven closures and 10,000 job losses in 1982. It is worth noting however that to date the Thatcher government has closed 92 pits compared with the 300 closed during the eleven years of Labour rule - the usefulness of having liason with the Unions when attacking workers is clear! In June 1983 the N.C.B. leaked 'secret' plans for a reduction of 25 million tonnes capacity and the closure of 70 pits with the loss of 70,000 jobs - Scargill's N.C.B. Hit List.



McGahey and Scargill have long histories of attacking miners.

The NUM in the Lead-Up to the Strike

If Thatcher wanted this strike then so too did the N.U.M.. The unions are an arm of the capitalist state, their role being to derail class struggle. Time and again they place themselves at the head of militancy so that they can destroy it. The Unions, like all other State factions, have their own perspectives on how best to organise and defend the national capital, both against other national capitals and against the militancy of their wage slaves, the working class, and will fight for the implementation of their views. Scargill has wanted a strike for some time because the accord cemented by the Plan For Coal (and the closure plans and redundancies therein) was threatened by the Tories who had different perspectives for the future. Three times in two years he had tried to marshal miners behind his schemes (using closures or pay as issues) and each time his strike call was rejected. In March 1983 when miners refused to strike over Lewis Merthyr pit's closure in South Wales it was clear that, ironically, the 1978 productivity deal crucial for continued union control over a divided workforce, had weakened the union's ability to use miners as cannonfodder to further its own political interests. Scargill at this point was forced to change tactics and moved to link pay with the increasing number of closures.

Thus at the N.U.M.'s October 1983 Conference his resolution linked the pay claim with opposition to closures, called not for a strike - which needed a 55% majority - but for an overtime ban which needed no vote. The ban was enthusiastically taken up by miners, despite its clear lack of effect. The ban was not another union attempt to demoralise workers though it clearly had that effect, but was Scargill's attempt to diminish the huge coal stocks in preparation for a strike. The N.C.B., in response spoiling for the showdown they had prepared for, became more aggressive: miners reporting for work on Monday were laid off quite unnecessarily so that 'maintenance could be done'; disputes were forced over break-times and the interpreting of work-records; in Scotland the N.C.B. refused to allow local pit management to provide safety cover and carried out a programme of selectively locking-out miners late for shifts after union meetings (two minutes late at Monktonhall) - this latter programme was restricted to those pits with a reputation for militancy (Monktonhall and Polmaise).

Finally in March, with winter past and demand for coal dropping, the closure was announced of the eleven year old Cortonwood pit, leading to strikes by 55,000 Yorkshire miners, soon followed by tens of thousands elsewhere, especially in Scotland. Scargill realised now that he could create a national stoppage from a series of area decisions - conforming to N.U.M. rule 41 allowing areas to call strikes without ballots. His campaign to sidestep his union's right-wing faction had succeeded. One week later the N.U.M. backed the Yorkshire and Scottish strikers (despite the opposition of the Executive's right-wingers - 14 votes out of 24 - who demanded a ballot) and by mid-March half the total 172 pits were idle. The strike had begun. A week after that a special union conference urged all areas to join and reduced the ballot requirement from 55% to a simple majority - a contingency should a ballot prove useful later on. The N.C.B.'s response was to weaken support by vastly increasing

the Golden Handshakes available to miners who wished to sell their jobs. Payment for ten years service went from £2,000 to £11,000 and for twenty years from £6,000 to £22,000.

But lest the 'militancy' of the N.U.M. fools anyone about its bourgeois credentials, the union's role in the wildcat strikes which led up to the overtime ban makes things very clear. In Scotland, where four out of the thirteen pits closed last year it actively sabotaged the strike at the condemned Polmaise pit as the Stalinist McGahey ordered walkouts in support at Solsgirth, Comrie and Seafield to stop. September 1983 saw 18,000 on wildcat strike ordered back to work by the N.U.M. Scottish strikes and occupations at Cardowan, Kinneil and Polmaise were all refused backing.

Polmaise is a good example of the proposed retrenchment to the Midlands. A year before its closure was announced it was being hailed as 'the success story of the Scottish Coalfield' by the N.C.B.'s Scottish Director. A report by Stirling University completely disproved later N.C.B. claims that it was capable of producing only low grade coal, but despite the £15 million spent on new workings which have never been opened, its closure was announced while the N.U.M., Scargill, McGahey and all, sabotaged the resistance of the miners to the closure.

Scargill's aims in the present strike have nothing to do with saving jobs or defending miners. His record as an organiser of closures and saboteur of workers struggles for the past ten years proves that. What he wants is for the N.U.M. to have a say in the running of the coal industry and he sees the strike ONLY as a weapon to achieve this. That's why he attacked the unofficial wildcat strikes which did not fit in with his overall strategy and which were not under his direct control. Scargill's programme is for a State Capitalism of the Russian bloc type as his support for Capitalist Cuba shows. The struggle of workers in Poland in recent years shows exactly how much British workers would have to gain from that, and the scab Polish coal flooding into Britain just now underlines the "working class" credentials of the Polish Bourgeoisie.

The NUM in the Strike

As we've said the role of the union has caused some confusion among those who are clear on the reactionary role of unions in general, but with the above background in mind its machinations become clear. Its role has been to lead the strike within strictly defined limits. The N.U.M. wants to show the government that it can deploy its troops effectively while at the same time making sure that it never loses control and lets the miners realise that they could organise their own struggle better if they could jettison the capitalist strategists of the N.U.M. In this, so far it has succeeded. It has shown that it is quite happy to go beyond legality and has made it clear that its "militancy" is not faked. So far, it has succeeded in transforming miners' militancy into a malleable club to wield against its bourgeois competitors within the State. Thus it cannot afford to be left behind by miners' militancy and hence Scargill's timely staged arrest and later 'injury' at the hands of the police. Further, it has had to constantly fight to divert the militancy of the miners into union ends and terrain. Thus it has acted promptly to ensure that it controls the flying pickets by laying on buses, stewards and media coverage; staging frequent high-

profile rallies; and keeping Scargill firmly in the Media's eye. Paying strike pay would have helped further to keep control but with a lengthy strike envisaged this could not be contemplated - the N.U.M.'s funds are a sizeable part of capital investment in many aspects of British Capitalist life.

The focus of picketing, for example, has remained either blacklegs within the coal industry or other workers in the industry who, having been on the receiving end of union carve-ups in the past like the Productivity Deal, didn't want to help rather than approaching the thousands of workers in other industries already engaged in fighting redundancies and wage cuts who might have responded to an extension of the fight against the bosses' austerity plans for British workers.

The picketing of the steelworks is another case in point. At Ravenscraig the union focussed on stopping coal lorries, thus aiding the police in their attempts to prevent miner speaking to steelworker. Ravenscraig is scheduled for closure in 1986 - the N.U.M. and I.S.T.C. know this and deliberately obscured the fact with their talk of 'not endangering the plant's future'. The appeal to steelmen, made union to union, was kept at the level of : Help us win our fight - make sacrifices for us. Understandably the steelmen did not respond. After all why should steel workers see their plants close and jeopardise their jobs to win for the miners what they can't have for themselves. Solidarity can only be about the realisation (and demonstration) that there is a common fight, one struggle. Scargill, Sirs, the N.U.R., A.S.L.E.F., T.G.W.U. etc have actively connived to mask the fact that miners are facing the



Pickets face up to the violence of the State with their own Class violence

Even when the N.U.M. has been forced to appeal to workers outside the industry it has been only on a union to union basis so that token, useless, half or one day stoppages could be organised, or so that coal could be blocked..

The huge confrontations at the Orgreave coking plant are a perfect example of how the unions are containing the strike, with thousands of militant miners channelled into a set-piece action which could offer no real victory. Despite the magnificent actions of the pickets and their recognition of the need for mass collective violence in the face of State violence, despite their stoning the police, barricading roads and ambushing lorries, nothing meaningful was, or could have been achieved so long as the unions retained control. Even if the coal had been stopped, which it was, the lorries came back the next day, and while pickets were tied up coal was getting in elsewhere. Time and again the N.U.M. has organised such ritualistic confrontations safe in the knowledge that they were in control and that so long as workers were confined to such actions they would remain in control.

identical attack that confronts other workers, that we support the miners by defending ourselves and by joining our struggles with theirs. Only in this way do workers realise that their interests are identical and thus their struggles must be too. Thus the union concentration on blacklegs is a ploy to contain the struggle. Of course scabs must be dealt with, but strikers main energies must be directed to workers who might join in the struggle. The stark fact is that if every miner came out, and every miner was in the picket line they would still lose if the state was determined to win this particular struggle. Coal would be shipped in, the army would be used, police repression would be further stepped up. The only way forward is through the generalisation of the fight - towards the mass strike!



The Other State Factions in the Strike

The degree of the State's determination to win this strike, to put the N.U.M. in its place and to hammer the rising level of class struggle in Britain (mirroring a rise throughout the world) is marked by the qualitative rise in State repression. The National Reporting Centre at Scotland Yard has deployed 20,000 police from 43 forces throughout the country (outraging many chief constables who have lost what they see as their autonomy) billeting them in mining villages and army barracks. They have used 'agents provocateurs', phone tapping, Special Branch video cameras, they have

The State's determination can be further seen in the costs it is prepared to incur in this strike. The extra 500,000 barrels of oil a day that Electricity Boards are importing is adding £25 million a week to the state's power bill. The N.C.B. is buying £600,000 of foreign coal a week to meet just one contract (with Inland Steel of Chicago). With coal production 70% down and steel 10% down, GDP in Britain has dropped 1.1% in the second quarter of the year. Growth is now forecast at 2% this year compared with 3% last. Loss of miners earnings has reduced consumer spending by 1% a quarter.



Allo! Allo! Allo!

"handcuffed, photographed and locked up miners for twenty four hours merely for being on a picket line" (Sunday Times), they have made over 4000 arrests and detained thousands more, they have used cavalry charges by club wielding mounted police, they have brought in riot squads set up after the inner city riots of 1981, they have set up road blocks to prevent miners from leaving their home areas - for ANY reason!, they have beaten up and arrested miners trying to make their way to picket lines, they have cordoned off whole areas of the coalfields, all of which to date have cost over £100,000,000. Time and again the police have broken law after law in their attempts to smash the miners - and have been fully backed by the courts. The Bourgeois State's elaborate edifice to con workers that its laws are objective and impartial, that Britain respects freedom of speech and movement, that the courts will defend 'civil rights', lies in ruins. Despite desperate Media attempts to falsify what is going on, workers are being shown that the rule of law serves to repress the working class and that if that repression is insufficient then the law will be ignored.

Clearly 1984 marks a qualitative step forward in class struggle when the State sees the need to begin dismantling its ideological disguise in such a profound way. The demands of the crisis are hacking back its scope for manoeuvre and in this lies great hope for future class strategy.

The Miners Militancy

But what of the miners themselves, faced with both union attempts at containment and intense state repression. The clearest feature of the strike is the incredible militancy of the workers, now in their sixth month on stike with no strike pay after nineteen weeks on an overtime ban in which they lost £70 million in wages. There is still no sign of the State starving out the miners despite the DHSS deducting £15 per week in lieu of (non-existent) strike pay from handouts supposed to stop miners' wives and children suffering hardship (and this in addition to snoopers squads specially set up to harass strikers) the NCB seizure of holiday pay, and Inland Revenue blocking of Tax Rebates. Financial pressure on strikers is enormous: mortgages, rents, electricity and gas bills cant be paid; telephones are being cut off; TVs, furniture, cars - an endless list of credit goods are being repossessed; meals depend on junk food; help from friends has become crucial. And yet there is no sign of weakening. On the contrary resolve has been strengthened, fuelled by an increased sense of community typified by the soup-kitchens, tea rooms and swap shops set up by miners' wives and families. Wives and families have also joined the demonstrations and have taken their places on the picket lines. And it is on these picket lines that the level of militancy can be fully seen.

Two clear lessons have been learned by a significant sector of British workers - that their fight is with the state, and that this fight must be prosecuted outside the law with mass collective violence. There has been a constant barrage from the media against this violence presenting it as immoral, the work of hooligans the breaking down of civilised British industrial relations etc. These lies obscure the fact that British capitalism has always used police (and army) repression when necessary in strikes. It also obscures the fact that the police tactics listed above are violent, that the attempts to starve out miners are violent, that the fundamental relations of capital to the working class is one of violent repression: from the slaughter of millions of workers in wars, with more planned, so that capitalism can stagger on, to the condemnation of the working class to a third rate existence in a world capable of abundance, condemned to third rate housing third rate education, third rate medical care etc. - this is violence! Threatening miners and their families with unemployment - with a future of despair, of grinding poverty, broken families, children blighted by lack of opportunity (and increasingly by drugs), eking out a grim existence while the media sneers out its images of affluence - this is violence!

Only the mass collective violence pointed to by the pickets can counter this state violence. And it is here that, despite the limitations of the strike, (the failure to break from the unions and the failure to attempt generalisation) the miners and thus the British working class have made great gains. Lessons have been learned from European struggles with roads and motorways being blocked, barricades have been built, weapons taken up against the police including battering rams, incessant stoning of the police, set piece battles being mounted, sabotage, ambushing and destruction of scab lorries and coaches, destruction of NCB property, including whole office blocks, the burning down of garages belonging to scab contractors, the beating up of press and TV hyenas, the raiding of NCB offices and the burning of personnel records, the community riots in areas such as Maltby and Fitzwilliam, the attacking and placing under seige of police stations. Workers struggles in Britain will probably never be the same again

But, as mentioned above, there are limitations and they are serious ones - they ensure that this strike ultimately will not be successful. We have attempted to show how the unions have tried to control and limit the strike: the dockworkers strike was provoked when unregistered labour was used on Humberside to take blacked ore to the Scunthorpe steel mill, and the dockers union was screaming even before the strike that this had nothing to do with the miners' dispute. Local right wing NUM officials in some cases have been attacked (often physically) when trying to cooperate with police in restraining picketing, but the left leadership has maintained its sway over the miners. This, and above all the question of generalisation (and there can be no

Pickets charged with plotting

By Patrick Wintour,
Labour Staff

Five pickets have been charged with conspiracy offences, the first time miners have faced conspiracy charges since picketing began. The five appeared on Thursday at Mansfield magistrates' court, charged with conspiring to cause criminal damage to property on May 8.

The full force of Bourgeois Law has been used to destroy the strike.

an impetus towards generalisation - particularly in the strike's early days - other workers such as nurses and railworkers joined picket lines, miners rushed to power stations and ports (from the Channel to Inverness), miners went to meet other strikers at BL Bathgate and Dunlop Sports in Barnsley. But there is no escaping the conclusion that it is precisely on this issue that we can find the most important weakness of the dispute. Generalisation has not been understood. Generalisation, as we've already pointed out, is not asking other workers to help you - that's charity not solidarity. Again we say, Solidarity can only be the realisation (and demonstration) that there is a common fight. There is no question about the enormous role of the unions in diverting the impetus towards generalisation into fake solidarity, but it is also a question of a failure of consciousness in the class itself. Its a barrier which is making itself felt but which is not being overcome. However, this failure is not a cause for pessimism - after all, if it were overcome workers would have made a gigantic step forward and indeed we would be faced with a Poland in the UK, a pre-revolutionary situation. Such a step is not something that can be taken in stages - to a large extent its all or nothing. The breakthrough would be explosive. Revolutionaries must face up to how this failure can generalisation until the union chains are broken) is the crux of the dispute - without generalisation the violence can go nowhere. There have been some signs of



Snatch Squads at work at Bilston.

be overcome and their intervention must be a crucial factor. Given the present lack of resources, however, (see below) the major engine of understanding must be the crisis itself as it deepens and makes explicit and simultaneous the common attack on workers and their common interests.

Thus also will the need for workers' self-organisation become clear - something again which has been lacking in the strike. There have been no independent strike committees or mass meetings to destroy the myth that union ballots have anything to do with democracy. Such ballots leave workers individualised and prey to ideological attack as they contemplate their 'own' vote without the strength and confidence-building of mass action. In contrast workers democracy, stemming from mass meetings, carries its own dynamic as workers experience their collective identity, strength and organisation. As Poland showed, such democracy inevitably leads to accountable and revokable delegates, and all planning and decisions carried out under the full glare of the mass assembly's inspection. While a fair degree of 'spontaneous' and 'autonomous' action has been tolerated on the picket

line the overall direction has been kept in NUM hands. Thus Scargill has been able to slink off for secret meetings with McGregor leaving miners standing in the wings. There has however been an underlying tendency for workers militancy to carry them beyond these confines, as witness the Fitzwilliam riots which laid siege to a police station and destroyed NCB offices, totally beyond the control of the NUM. Thus again we must not be pessimistic in working out the balance sheet for the strike. After all, to say that miners have failed to throw up their own class organs and push for generalisation is close to saying that workers have failed to make the revolution. And do we expect them to do this at present? These steps are difficult, as we said, to make a little at a time. What is important today is that workers are being forced harder and harder against the brick wall reality of the need for such further steps, while at the same time the State's options for manoeuvre are narrowing.

GM/Cormack

The Miners Strike and the Role of Revolutionaries

As well as testing the combativity of the British working class, the miners' strike has been a rigorous examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the communist movement in this country. (By communist movement we mean revolutionary groups and not the Leftist swamp of Trotskyists, members of the Communist Party, Labour Party, etc.) The role of revolutionaries in such a strike should be clear: pointing the way forward, calling on other workers to take up their own struggles, providing a political leadership, distributing their press and leaflets so as to expose the unions, spreading news of local, foreign and historical techniques of struggle and violence, fighting the divisions between workers, situating the conflict within the wider, international perspective, calling for militant involvement in all areas of the struggle (for example, calling on miners to make mass visits to Social Security benefit offices to demand money). But when we review the practice of revolutionary groups we discover a mixed balance sheet.

The Dead-End of Sectarianism

On the positive side this strike has produced the largest mobilization of revolutionary resources in the post-war period. The major communist groups have distributed thousands of leaflets, sold their publications to strikers, held public meetings on topics raised by the strike and debated with miners on the picket lines. Against this we must note the tremendous legacy of sectarianism in the movement - the almost total refusal of groups to countenance joint interventions in this important dispute. The strike has highlighted our incredibly meagre resources and underlined how fragmented we are - a fragmentation compounded by the sectarian behaviour of the two largest communist groups in Britain: the Communist Workers Organisation and the International Communist Current.

In an article in World Revolution no 71 the ICC make a number of good criticisms (some of which are discussed below) of interventions by other communist militants in the dispute, but these would have been far more effective had they been made before the leaflets and publications were distributed. Unfortunately the sectarianism of the ICC forbids such cross-fertilization. The appalling consequences of ICC (and CWO) insularity were perfectly illustrated by events at a miners' rally held outside the union delegate conference in Sheffield - here representatives of five communist groups were handing out virtually identical leaflets with no prior cooperation, with the creditable exception of a joint CBG/Wildcat leaflet. ICC members present refused even to speak to the other comrades involved! This demonstrates what we have been saying about the ICC over the last three years: the communist movement - and thus the class struggle - is weakened because of its refusal to take up seriously the tasks of revolutionary work.

The CWO, also locked into its own sectarianism, have rejected offers of joint work in this crucial strike, determined not to sully their party purity by cooperating with the rest of the milieu. Seeking to excuse their conduct they bleat in Workers Voice no 17, "whatever individual leaflets might be saying there had to be a common framework of political aims before joint work was possible". While the class acts, its revolutionary minorities fret about their sectarian purity. Given the already fragmented and pitifully small resources of the milieu, this is a tragedy for the class! (The CWO will only consider joint work when they see tactical opportunities to exploit, such as their dalliances with Iraqi Councilists and Iranian Maoists.)

The intervention of localist/libertarian groups in

the strike has been predictably poor. They seem to consider the strike boring compared with exciting issues like vegetarianism and sexual politics. Intercom has failed to transcend its libertarian muddleheadedness and 'anti-centralism' so as to make even one comment on the strike. The London Workers Group refused to make any intervention because there were no miners in their locality! One libertarian group refused to sign and distribute a joint leaflet because it didn't attack the miners for their 'male-chauvinism', and anyway they considered the CBG to be 'anti-gay'. Here, graphically, are the consequences of localism and 'decentralisation' - at best a sop to the apathy of dead-beats, at worst demoralisation for militants attempting to move towards communist positions. The miners' strike has demonstrated the bankruptcy of the Intercom project far more effectively than anything we could have written.

The only group that we have found willing to cooperate with us and make a joint intervention in the strike has been Wildcat. We don't pretend to agree with everything they have done - there have been signs of immediacy and dissolving themselves into the strike, losing sight of their essential tasks. Nor do we hide the fact that we have serious political disagreements with this group. But we maintain that cooperation with them has sharpened our interventions and raised concrete issues that will inform our debates with this group in the future. There are surely lessons here for the ICC and the CWO. Their debate on consciousness is a ridiculous ping-pong match of insults - it would be better to attempt joint work and discover, in practice, how far their two approaches diverge.

Issues Raised by the Strike

In the article referred to in World Revolution no 71 the ICC attack Wildcat for mentioning only strikes in the north of England in their leaflet. The ICC omit to add that the second edition of this leaflet, co-signed by the CBG, corrected this mistake and placed full emphasis on the national and international dimensions of the strike. The ICC also attack Wildcat for drawing distinctions between "enemy number one - the state" and enemy number two - the unions". The ICC argues that, "This position is inadequate: it gives the impression that the capitalist class is simply divided into competing gangs and does not have a coherent, organised framework (the state) through which it confronts the working class in an intelligent and unified manner". Superficially the ICC are correct - in the era of capitalist decadence there is a universal tendency for unions to be integrated into the state, although the extent of that integration will vary from country to country. However the ICC's contention that the Government and the NUM are working in perfect harmony against the miners does not stand up to the evidence. We must recognise that Scargill and the NUM are out to win the strike (by keeping it

under their own control) for their own bourgeois ends. Revolutionaries seek to unmask the role of the unions and to encourage workers to take the struggle into their own hands, but the absurd conspiracy theories of the ICC will be greeted with derision on the picket lines.

The CBG shares many of the criticisms made by the ICC of the interventions in the strike by the CWO. The CWO has failed to live up to its oft-repeated claim that it is the only group in Britain making a concrete intervention in the class struggle. To their credit the CWO admit in Workers Voice no 17 that the first three leaflets they issued were inadequate. The group has fallen into the trap, a feature of unions and the leftists, of limiting calls for 'solidarity' to the movement of coal and has failed to spell out just what generalisation must mean for workers. Thus they have called for other workers, for instance in the power industry, to 'help' by stopping the movement of coal instead of showing that the only way forward is for workers to take up their own demands. Similarly a recent CWO leaflet proclaimed that, "if all handling of coal was stopped the strike would be won in two weeks". No mention of the fact that any such victory would be strictly temporary. Revolutionaries have a duty to spell out that a victory today means that the bosses will be back at our throats tomorrow, more determined than ever. The CWO has sadly tended to tail-end the struggle rather than act as a vanguard - we think they would learn a lot through discussion and joint work with other groups.

The Lesson for Revolutionaries from the Strike

The lesson that revolutionaries must draw from this strike is clear. Class actions demand that we take up the spirit of cooperation beginning to be developed by the CBG and Wildcat: to husband our meagre resources and not further fragment them, to criticize each others interventions fraternally so as to strengthen the impact of the milieu within the class - not merely to score points, to take up joint interventions that the current struggle demands - joint denunciations of the unions, joint calls for generalisation, joint calls for self-activity by the class. Even given the real differences between the groups such joint interventions are possible now. Each attempt to side-step their implementation is a betrayal of the class which has been given a bright beacon by the militant struggle of the British miners, a torch being taken up by French steelworkers, miners and carworkers; Belgian steelmen and dockers; German engineers, shipyard workers, miners and steelmen; workers in Bolivia, India, Scandinavia and throughout the world.

Rowntree

Communist Bulletin Group
Our Platform

published in Bulletin 4 copies of which are still available
from the group address at BOX 85, 43 CANDLEMAKERS ROW, EDINBURGH.
SCOTLAND. UNITED KINGDOM.



The Miners Strike in Lancs

9.

Since the strike began, Wildcat has intervened on picket lines, talking to strikers and giving out leaflets (two of which were jointly signed by the Communist Bulletin Group). We have been arguing the effects of trade unionism — both in the actions of the officials and in the heads of NUM members.

BACKGROUND

In the Lancashire area, there are eight pits owned by the NCB, employing 6,500 miners. It is a shrinking area of coal production. The closure of Cronton pit was announced on March 2nd. 1984, and it is now only operating salvage work. At Age-

Wildcat regarded the overtime ban — begun in November 1983 — as a diversion from a strike. Whether this was deliberate or not, its effect was to make the less militant miners reluctant to strike because they were short of money. However, it is defended by militant pickets, who claim the ban was effective in lowering coal stocks.

The result of the ballot in Lancs., on whether or not to strike against the NCB's redundancy and pay plans for 1984-5, was announced on March 16th. Only Bold pit had a majority in favour of striking. At the other pits (apart from Agecroft, which voted decisively against), the result was close. Overall, 59% of those who voted



Miners call on other workers to join them at the start of the strike.

croft pit in Salford, there is only one coal face working. All the other pits are remnants of the old mining community around Wigan and St. Helens, and they are threatened with redundancies.

The 1977 productivity deal, initiated by Tony Benn and forced through by the NUM executive despite a National Ballot rejecting it, led to differences in pay between areas. A faceworkers basic wage is £130 a week before stoppages (surface workers get less.) Productivity bonuses can be up to £100 at the most productive pits in the country — none of which are in Lancashire.

were against strike action. 3 days later, pickets from Yorkshire arrived throughout the Lancs. coalfield. The strike spread, thousands of miners went on strike, and coal production — for the time being — was stopped.

LIMITATIONS ON THE STRIKE : THE POLICE

The police responded to the mass picketing by setting up roadblocks on all roads out of Yorkshire, and on the motorway exits in Manchester. We were told of

pickets turned away three times and escorted back to Yorkshire, before getting through. The police have mainly been concentrating on Agecroft, as the 'show pit' to be kept working. Only with the arrival of hundreds of pickets from Northumberland and Durham on May 1st., did the police become more aggressive and make more arrests. But they have been resisted. We were told of three Northumberland miners who were arrested and locked in a police van with a superintendent – they threatened to break his neck unless he let them out. He did !

LIMITATIONS ON THE STRIKE : THE MEDIA

One of the main concerns of the pickets has been the media, particularly the TV news portrayal of strikers, lies about the numbers of miners working in the local papers, and the journalists and camera crews touring the picket lines looking for violence. The 'Sun' is singled out by the miners we talked to as the worst offender. We had the pleasure of taking part in the removal of 'Daily Express' reporters from a mass picket at Golborne pit. The media is not just an enemy of the strikers in its bias and lies, but is equally effective in its suppression of information. Miners from Northumberland say that there are no power stations working in Northumberland and all the power workers are laid off. There is no news of these examples of the picketting's effectiveness, or of workers struggles taking place in other countries.

LIMITATIONS ON THE STRIKE : THE N.U.M.

The Lancashire NUM officials made explicit that they had no wish to see the class violence of mass picketting remain on 'their' territory. Frank King, NUM Branch President of Parkside pit, said that pickets calling out 'scab' and 'blackleg', "make it hard to cross the picket line". What did he expect the pickets to say ?! Gaskell, NUM Branch Secretary at Golborne pit, commented that the "pickets were jeering and shouting", and "had a bad effect on the afternoon shift". These officials wanted control of the Lancashire area. They called a one-week official strike, for March 26th-30th, it was said to "press for a national ballot". Gaskell, however, revealed the real reasons : "Things were getting

too hot with the pickets ... we decided to quieten the situation". The effect was to remove the pickets from Yorkshire, and send the Lancashire miners home.

Only the most militant miners came out to picket. At Bold pit a strike committee was elected to organise picketting. Miners were told to picket only their own pits. Consequently, they had no information, and we had to tell them what was happening at other pits we had visited. There was some 'unofficial' picketting of power stations, but the pickets were told not to do that until union leaders had met. The pickets we spoke to said they didn't want a national ballot – it was unnecessary as the strike was growing. At Sutton Manor and Bold pits, there were disputes about safety cover. Pickets at these pits told us "we're staying out next week whatever the Lincs NUM decide."

CONFUSION

What the Lincs NUM did decide, at a delegate meeting on March 31st, was to call off the strike action. This set the scene of confusion which has plagued the Lancashire miners ever since. Agecroft returned to work, Bold and Sutton Manor stayed out, Cronton kept working salvage, and miners at other pits were divided. The pickets didn't know what the local NUM was doing, or what the officials' attitude to the strike was.

Following the National NUM conferences in Sheffield on April 12th and 19th, when the ballot rules were changed, and the area strikes re-affirmed, Lancashire leaders were concerned not to return to mass picketting where they were not in control. At an area NUM delegate meeting in Bolton on April 27th, a decision was taken to "ask" miners to join the strike. It was later reported that "many branch secretaries had no mandate to vote either way." There had been no consultation at all with the miners. The union removed workers completely from decision-making, while obviously they wanted to participate. There was mass-lobbying of all union meetings. We were told at Sutton Manor pit that half the miners there wanted to attend the first area delegate meeting, but only one coach was going.

The pickets told us that the last Lincs NUM meeting was arranged to find a way

of sending them back to work, which is why thirty of the lobbying miners organised a sit-in and occupied the NUM headquarters at Bolton. They wanted to prevent further meetings, saying "you don't need a meeting to run the strike — only to call it off." Sid Vincent, Lancs NUM General Secretary, is hated by the strikers for saying different things to different people. During the sit-in he said NUM meetings were cancelled because he wouldn't cross the picket line at Bolton.

While this sit-in was going on, the message from the union on the picket lines at the pits is "Work normally and don't cross the official picket lines." No-one knows what this means! On May 5th a striking miner from Golborne pit showed a letter saying "from this afternoon, the strike is official at Golborne." He had been on strike for eight weeks.

On May 8th, Vincent declared the strike in Lancashire official. The sit-in ended, but there was some feeling that they should have stayed and used the NUM facilities to print leaflets themselves. Everyone on the picket lines knew that many fewer miners had been working, due to the presence of 300 Northumberland and Durham pickets — not due to Sid Vincent.

Miners told us that the strike was to make sure that no pits were shut until they were worked out. It is obvious that when a pit is 'worked out', it is not that there is literally no coal left, nor is it anything to do with peoples' need for coal or jobs; it is what is considered economically viable by the bosses. We argued the need to go beyond this, at least to include the pay claim and grievances over working conditions. This would be one way to involve miners who were reluctant to strike. Some miners thought that once pit closures were settled, then the pay claim and all other matters would be settled. No-one thought *they* could alter the demands of the strike. It was up to Scargill.

YORKSHIRE PICKETS

Lancashire miners were suspicious of 'their' local union, and consequently were more interested in ideas of self-organisation, such as organising picketting themselves, and tape-recording union meetings. On the whole, older miners had less faith in Scargill than the younger ones — who mainly made up the mass pickets. The pickets from Yorkshire were more keen to defend *all* NUM actions, although we heard an



Picketing miners at the NCB offices in Doncaster.

interesting story from a picket from Selby in Yorkshire. We asked why Yorkshire miners did not support the South Wales fight over redundancies in January 1983. He told us that pickets from South Wales arrived at Selby, a meeting was called, and the miners there agreed to strike. But the Branch NUM officials were divided, and as a result of their equivocations, the action ended in a one-day token strike. He said he thought it would have been better to strike then, last year, when there was more support.

COAL MOVEMENTS

Coal is only supposedly being moved from pitheads to hospitals, old and handicapped peoples' homes, schools and miners' families. In fact, union officials are issuing vast numbers of dispensations for factories using coal. Pickets at Sutton Manor told us that union convenors at local factories had made agreements with the NUM to take coal if it was used for heating the factories, and not for manufacturing. If workers had had collections for the miners, coal was being taken to those workplaces. At Plesseys in Liverpool, workers were being made redundant. The unions there were campaigning for higher redundancy payments — and arranging with the NUM for coal to go in and keep the factory operating!

ON THE PICKET LINES

The numbers of active Lancashire pickets is tiny. Since the strike began, at any time there has been a maximum of about 100. Thousands of miners are at home, for the whole idea of being on strike is based on not turning up to work, and waiting for victory to be negotiated. The active pickets realise the need to combat this. They said they need more pickets to stop all the mines, the power stations, and all coal moving. They have had some successes: the NCB machinery works has been closed, 90% of train drivers are refusing to move coal from Warrington and Wigan, and despite what the papers say, very little coal has actually been mined here since the start of the strike.

We argued the crucial importance of active participation in actually controlling the strike, and the strength of collective action. The pickets agreed, saying how you "saw things from the other side" when you were actively picketting. But the shortage

of pickets led to demoralisation, as day after day, they watched local miners going in to work. They were unable to picket power stations as there were too few of them to resist police aggression, and they were unable to stop coal moving from a massive local coal dump. This led to desperation, the lowest point being before the arrival of the Northumberland pickets on May 1st. The Lancashire miners turned to sabotage: NCB lorry tyres were slashed, nails spread, and conveyor belts cut through. We were told: "If we can't stop them one way, we have to do it another."

SPREAD THE STRIKE!

The crucial point about the limitations of the strike so far, is that *all* the miners we have talked to, are aware of how vital the strike is for the whole working class — in the fight for our interests; to show workers can get the upper hand over the bosses. *But* there is a reluctance to argue that the strike should therefore be spread beyond the miners. Time and again they say "we must get all the miners out first." We say it's the same fight for all workers, that no jobs or working conditions are safe in this crisis, but the miners have been approaching other workers as trade union members. For example, there are two opencast pits in the area, not owned by the NCB, and with workers in the TGWU not the NUM, so they are still mining coal even though they are in their own dispute over pay and conditions. Lorry drivers in the TGWU who have been threatened with the sack if they refuse to cross picket lines, are left isolated in a personal dilemma, and so pickets have let them cross. The response must be collective, from the workers themselves, not directives of general support from union leaders to individual members.

Active miners had visited local factories to collect money, and told of their embarrassment and humiliation when doing this. We said that the arguments of the strike, not buckets for money, should be taken to other workers, especially those with their own struggles. Rather than diverting all energy into picketing Nottinghamshire and Agecroft pit in Lancashire, if miners joined their strike with other workers, the scab miners would see the potential in a strong movement and join in.

Even within the mines, on the picket lines the first question is "what union are

you in?" On a picket line at Parkside pit, we saw all non-NUM members drive in to work, not stopped at all by the pickets. When we visited Bold pit in May, the pickets we spoke to thought that the canteen workers ought to be on strike too. But, they said that *they* couldn't tell them that. "I'm just a worker — I've no authority" was what they said, and asked us to go to the strike committee, as they couldn't leave the picket line! This is what being in a strong union means — workers unable to have confidence in themselves as workers, without the backing of the NUM.

Through making these criticisms, Wildcat is now greeted on the picket lines as "You're the ones who support the miners but not the union".

SIGNS OF RADICALISATION

It was the desperation of the most militant pickets in Lancashire, and the ineffectiveness of the struggle as it was being run by the union, that created an awareness of the need for more radical action. Wildcat produced a leaflet with the agreement of these pickets, urging all members of the working class to join the picket lines, and to transform the struggles of other workers into immediate joint strike action with the miners. It was to be given out as widely as possible, by the pickets as well as Wildcat members. If large numbers of non-miners turned up to the picket lines — which was not inconceivable, given local community support — then not only the present organisation, but the trade unionist preconceptions of the strike would have been challenged, and, we thought, significantly altered.

As it was, although the leaflet was well-received, it was inappropriate. We had over-estimated how far the radicalisation of the Lancashire pickets went. And after talk of solidarity by Scargill, NUR and ASLEF bosses put a stop to any strike movement on the railways, and went to negotiate. The leaflet also coincided with a change in the NUM's tactics for controlling the strike, which pushed the pickets further back into the union's grasp. About 300 miners

from Northumberland and Durham arrived to form daily mass pickets throughout the Lancashire coalfield. In contrast to self-organised mass picketting being an expression of the collective strength of the working class, what is happening at the moment is a totally controlled, military-style operation. Scargill is himself directing mass picketting nationally. The individuals involved are simply so much cannon-fodder, in set-piece confrontations with the police, such as at Agecroft pit, or, on a larger scale, at the Orgreave coke works in Yorkshire. The local NUM officials have little fear of such rituals. Militant workers are given their role to play in the strike in these mass pickets, giving the illusion of positive activity while preventing them from radicalising their own tactics and demands.

13.

Miners in Lancashire feel there is less need to become involved, as the strike has been taken out of their hands. The strike committee organises pickets from a locked room at Bold Miners Welfare Club, which is being used to accommodate people. The initiative for action and the ability to move the strike forward beyond its original aims, has been removed. The NUM seems to have captured this potential and diverted it onto strictly limited terrain. The recent attempt of Lancashire NUM to expel the miners who are still working, is another way of re-capturing the loyalty of militants.

POSTSCRIPT

As this is being written, the miners strike continues. Wildcat will continue to analyse events and respond with propaganda. We have learnt a lot from our interventions in this strike so far. This will not be our last word on the matter.

H., Wildcat

4th June 1984

Wildcat can be contacted, and copies of their leaflets can be obtained, by writing to :

Wildcat, c/o Autonomy Centre,
8-10 Gt. Ancoats St., MANCHESTER 10

This article has also appeared in Workers Playtime whose typesetting we have used. Workers Playtime can be contacted c/o 84 Whitechapel High St. London E 1.

An Unhappy Intervention

The sort of experiences described by Wildcat in the article earlier in this issue of the Bulletin will strike a chord with most revolutionaries who have been active during the miners' strike. However when the Communist Bulletin Group intervened at a miners rally addressed by Scargill in Dalkeith near Edinburgh at the end of August we saw another, and most unwelcome dimension to the dispute.

The leaflet we handed out at the rally (reproduced in this issue 'The Fight Must Spread to Every Worker') had two basic messages: side one argued that the strike must be extended to other sections of the working class; side two that control of the strike must be ripped out of the hands of Scargill and the NUM. As miners began to read the leaflet there were murmurs of agreement with the passages about generalization, but their mood exploded into anger when they realized what we were saying on page two: here were people attacking the Union! Our militants were rounded on by groups of miners asking why we were handing out a "scab" leaflet and demanding to know who gave us the leaflets to distribute (the clear implication was that we were in some way agents of the Coal Board). Our claims that the NUM was the main obstacle to the success of the strike fell on deaf ears, and we were warned not to hand out any more "scab leaflets". Miners dispossessed us of our leaflets, and we came within a hair's breadth of having our teeth kicked in.

Virtually every revolutionary who intervenes in the class struggle has experienced abuse and sometimes violence from hostile workers. Usually this is because we are seen as an 'outside troublemaker' or 'commie bastard'. What was so galling about the ugly scene at the Dalkeith rally was that militant strikers perceived us as being against the strike and on the same side as MacGregor, Silver Birch and the Nottingham scabs. What lessons can be learnt from all this?

Firstly we have to examine the effectiveness of our own leaflet. Did we give a clear enough explanation of the communist critique of union-

ism, making it clear that while attacking the Miner's Union we are fully behind the miner's struggle? Perhaps one or two sentences could have been better phrased, but it was clear to us that any attack on the union would have been a red rag to the bull. So should we have missed out the attack on Unions, and, like some of the CWO's leaflets, contented ourselves to a sentence or two about not leaving everything to Union officials? We think not; such a move would have been an abrogation of our revolutionary duty. Leftists are constantly screaming about "winning the strike"; what distinguishes a communist intervention is the insistence that a struggle can only go forward if it is taken out of union control and generalized throughout the working class.

The second lesson of the incident is what it tells us about the striker's state of mind at this stage of the fight. In the early days of the strike there seemed to be real chances of the strike getting out of union control, but with each passing week this possibility has become more and more remote. After six months Scargill and the union apparatus are in full control, with all other sources of initiative snuffed out. Miners have been confronted by the full armoury of the state, endured tremendous hardship and yet remain isolated with no hopes for a quick victory. In blind desperation militant miners cling to a simple dichotomy: you are with the NUM and us, or you are against the union and with the Coal Board and the Government. Loyalty to the militant unionism of the NUM has been the achilles heel of the strike. As we have tried to show, when workers are in this mood it becomes very difficult to make an effective communist intervention. We would like to open up a debate with other revolutionary tendencies over how best to intervene in such circumstances.

Rowntree

NEXT ISSUE

- * More on the World Wide Resurgence of Class Struggle
- * Three Major Perspectives Articles
- * A Major Analysis from Hong Kong of the Drift of the CWO towards Battaglia and the resultant abandonment of their previous clarity.

THE MINERS FIGHT IS OUR FIGHT

How Can The Miners Win Their Fight?

This strike can be won! But miners must know who their allies are, and who their enemies are.

Enemy Number One: The State.

Miners have been confronted by what has been described as the biggest police operation since World War II. The police are in the front line of a concerted action by all the forces of the state. The media backs up the police with lies and hate stories against the miners. The Courts support "unconstitutional" police action. So much for Democracy! The N.C.B. has provoked the strike with the backing of the Government which wants to smash the miners to clear the way for attacks against every section of the working class.

AGAINST THE UNITED FRONT OF THE STATE ONLY THE UNITED WORKING CLASS CAN WIN!

The massive response by the police shows that the government and bosses are scared of the pickets. But as long as workers remain divided and set against each other, the bosses know they can win. To keep the workers divided the bosses know they can rely on their loyal servants, the Unions.

Enemy Number Two: The Unions.

The actions of the N.U.M. speak for themselves.

January 1983: The NUM sabotages growing rank and file movement against pit closures. In Scotland as pickets from the Kinneil pit gain support for their sit-in McGahey calls off the strike. Kinneil pit is closed. In Wales the NUM ignores a 80% vote for strike action against job losses. The threatened pits are closed. In Kent NUM opposes strike action against compromise deal over redundancies at Snowden pit.

March 1983: Scargill calls for a national strike against pit closures!!!

3rd November 1983: Start of overtime ban. Coal stocks are 60 million tons.

Oct/Nov 1983: Seven week strike against redundancies at Monktonhall pit in Scotland. The NUM negotiates what they call a "victory". None of the strikers demands are met.

14th January 1984: Scargill says the overtime ban is "having a devastating effect". It is, for the miners. Derbyshire faceworkers wages are down to a basic £76 per wk. By March each Yorkshire miner has lost £360. NCB coal stocks are estimated at 50 million tons.

Jan/Feb 1984: Action by Scottish miners at Bogside and Polmaise pits against closures. Spontaneous walk-outs throughout Scotland in response to new shifts and productivity deals. Scottish NUM executive meeting refuses to call an all-out strike saying there is no support. Polmaise miners storm out of the meeting and attack McGahey.

March 1984: The confusion during the present strike is just the culmination of years of confusion caused by the NUM's divisive manoeuvres.

The NUM, like other unions defends its own power and influence within the capitalist system, the same system whose crisis has caused the run-down of the coal industry.

Thus the 'victory' McGahey claimed at Monktonhall was simply an NCB agreement to consult the NUM before making further closures. The NUM accepts the need for these closures. It supports token actions by miners but has consistently opposed or sabotaged any effective action. Its strategy has been to use the overtime ban to increase the divisions already caused by the productivity deals - to set winders against faceworkers, Nottinghamshire against Yorkshire, miner against miner.

Spread The Strikes.

The fierceness with which the miners have picketted to extend the strike demonstrates that they have learned a fundamental lesson - there are no safe jobs. Sooner or later everyone will be threatened with the same fate. And if the struggle is isolated to only those under immediate threat it will be lost. The miners have understood that their strength lies only in solidarity. That is why they have picketted so fiercely so as to involve all the pits.

But the lessons learned within the mining industry apply to the whole working class. We all face the same fate. If the fight is confined to only one factory, only one industry, only one area or only one country then we will be picked off one by one and beaten. Therefore the struggles already going on throughout the country, at BL Bathgate etc. - must be linked to the miners.

STRIKE WITH THE MINERS

GO TO THE MINERS AND ELECT JOINT STRIKE COMMITTEES WITH THEM

TAKE THE FIGHT TO OTHER WORKERS

Take the fight to the Power Stations, to the Docks, to the Railways - as the Scottish, Welsh and Yorkshire miners are already doing.

The Unions are Against Us.

But if the miners have understood the lessons of collective strength they have not understood that it can only be exercised outside of and against the Unions.

In every industry the Unions are at the forefront of pushing through the cuts, the redundancies and the speed-ups. Certainly they have their little squabbles with the bosses and the state about how and where and how fast to implement the attacks on workers, but in the last analysis they accept that these attacks are necessary. They accept that the need to be 'competitive' in the capitalist market-place comes before the needs of workers. That's why they smother and isolate every strike. That's why they divert solidarity into useless whipsnaps and "resolutions" of support and that's why they divide workers trade by trade, area by area, factory by factory. And that's why our strikes, our picketting, the spreading of solidarity must be controlled by workers themselves, by our own elected and recallable strike committees. DONT TRUST THE UNIONS.

The Law and the State is Against Us.

The clearest lesson of the miners strike is that a strike which remains legal is a strike which will be defeated. Behind each boss stands the state. And it will use every weapon it possesses - laws, the police, the army - and any amount of force and violence required - to break our struggles. We can only fight successfully if we spread the struggle and that demands the use of pickets. If we can't picket we can't fight. And faced with the current police mobilisation we can only picket if we are prepared to confront the force of the capitalist state with our own mass collective force.

IGNORE THE PICKETING GUIDELINES. THEY'RE DESIGNED TO DEFEAT US.

APPROACH POLICE ROAD BLOCKS IN SUFFICIENT STRENGTH TO FORCE A WAY THROUGH.
MEET THE VIOLENCE OF THE STATE WITH MASS CLASS VIOLENCE.

SUPPORT THE MINERS!

SPREAD THE STRIKES!

AGAINST THE STATE.

AGAINST THE UNIONS!

This leaflet is produced by the Communist Bulletin Group.
We can be contacted at Box 85. 43 Candlemakers Row. EDINBURGH.

ALL WORKERS, SUPPORT THE MINERS ! JOIN THE STRIKE !

As the coal strike enters its second month, the whole weight of the state is trying desperately to crush the miners' revolt. Day in and day out, the press and TV whine continuously about the need for a ballot and hammer home the anti-strike message. Tens of thousands of police have been mobilised to stop pickets travelling to other pits.

The success of the miners' strike is vital if we are to call a halt to the savage attacks currently being waged against the working class. This is why **THE MINERS' FIGHT IS OUR FIGHT !**

AGAINST THE UNITED FORCES OF THE STATE, ONLY THE UNITED WORKING CLASS CAN WIN

How can we support the miners ?

Financial support is not enough. However much money we collect, we cannot hope to match the money with which the government and the bosses are backing the NCB.

Blacking of all coal is vital. Don't wait for the pickets! All workers should refuse to accept deliveries of coal, and refuse to use existing coal stocks.

Unemployed workers, join the picket lines!

BUT THE MOST EFFECTIVE SUPPORT WE CAN GIVE IS TO JOIN THE STRIKE, BY CHOOSING THIS MOMENT TO TAKE UP OUR OWN DEMANDS

Thousands of workers are threatened with redundancies. Now is the time to strike or occupy against these redundancies.

Thousands of workers are due to settle their annual pay claim. Now is the time to strike for these claims. Don't wait for the negotiations! Strike now and force the Bosses to give in to our demands!

Nothing scares the bosses more than a united working class: the strike at Dunlop Sports in Barnsley against redundancies and a wage cut, where workers forged close links with the miners, ended in complete success after less than a week.

Thousands of workers, such as the water workers, have had derisory wage offers accepted by their union leaders. These decisions can be overturned by rank and file action!

Everywhere where struggles are taking place, make links with the miners, and other workers struggling in your area. This is happening already. One thousand steelworkers in Lanarkshire are striking over bonus payments and the use of outside contractors. They are joining picketing miners at other local steelworks and linking their struggles. This shows the way forward for the miners' strike!

Among workers whose pay claims are coming up soon are power workers and rail workers. On the railways BR have linked this year's wage offer to a productivity deal which, like the NCB's deal, will lead to redundancies. Immediate action by power and rail workers in support of the miners AND their own claims would create a movement of devastating power.

TURN THE MINERS STRIKE INTO A MASS STRIKE !

FOR MASS ASSEMBLIES

AGAINST THE BALLOT

Enemies of the miners call for a ballot because they know that when voting in a ballot, a worker on strike can only be conscious of his or her weakness and problems *as an individual*. The call for a ballot is a cynical attempt to defeat the strike by playing on the fears of *individual miners*.

Scargill's answer to the ballot — a delegate conference to decide *whether or not to strike* is a *dangerous diversion*. The issue is not whether or not to strike but *how to win the strike*.

The answer to the ballot is MASS MEETINGS where miners can assert their *collective power*. Where they can not only show their determination to continue the struggle, but also discuss how to extend and radicalise the strike.

SPREAD THE PICKETS !

In Yorkshire and South Wales union leaders are trying to limit the picketing, using the excuse that there is not enough money.

Union leaders want a traditional trade union strike where the strikers sit at home while their leaders negotiate for them.

Against this sabotage by their leaders, *all miners* must be persuaded of the need to take an active part in the strike. Against the massed ranks of the police, every miner is needed on the picket lines. If you can't afford to travel, picket targets nearer home, like *power stations, rail depots, steelworks and shipyards*.

This means breaking the law. But if we respect the picket laws, the strike will be defeated!

Pickets should appeal to workers as fellow workers, not as union members. At the moment many workers will respect 'official' picket lines but cross 'unofficial' ones. This attitude means that the strike could be broken at any time by a sell-out by the officials.

SPREAD THE STRIKE !

Already trade union leaders are sabotaging miners' efforts to break down the traditional divisions between workers in different unions :

In Scotland, Humberside and South Wales, union leaders have negotiated deals to let coal through to steelworks which have been *successfully picketed* by the miners. At Port Talbot, Welsh NUM President Emlyn Williams did a deal with the police to call off most of the pickets.

Union leaders want to limit solidarity action by other workers to passing wordy resolutions, and collections. Even the most 'militant' union leaders will never support *active* solidarity actions. In 1980, during the steel strike, Scargill led Yorkshire miners onto the picket lines, *for one day*, but *refused* calls from the steelworkers for the miners to join the strike.

In the present strike, even calls to stop the movement of coal are largely symbolic. Dispensations are being issued left, right and centre.

How much can we expect from official union solidarity can be seen from the fact that leaders of the famous triple alliance are now meeting to decide how much scab coal to allow through to the steel industry!

Against this sabotage, miners should continue and *increase*

their efforts to spread the strike. Every worker who is prepared to struggle against the threat of redundancy, which ever union he or she is in, is part of the same struggle as the miners.

WHEN THE WORKING CLASS UNITES ACROSS UNION DIVISIONS IT WILL BE UNBEATABLE !

DON'T TRUST YOUR LEADERS.

Many workers have no time for right wing union leaders like Lancs Area NUM President Sid Vincent, who said "I've been an official for 18 years and I've always believed in co-operation with management".

But 'left-wing' union leaders quickly become right-wing ones. like Sid Vincent, when they gain a position of power. Many young miners don't believe that Joe Gormley was once regarded as a dangerous left-winger ! McGahey has a reputation as a militant extremist — but as President of the Scottish NUM he has sold out the strikes at Polmaise and Bogside, and Kinneil.

NO COMPROMISES !

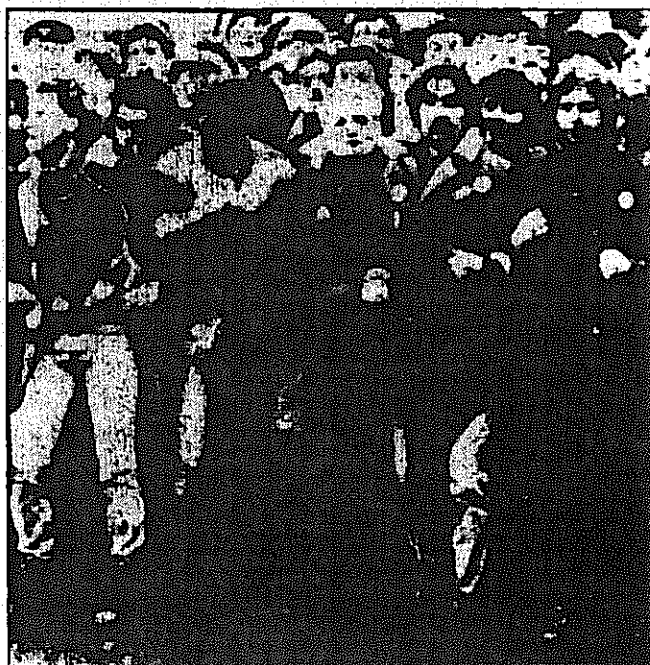
Why is it that workers are constantly 'betrayed' by their union leaders ?

The basic idea of trade unionism is that it is possible to arrive at a compromise between the interests of the capitalists and the workers. The union leader's job is to sell these compromises to their members, and to avoid strike action wherever possible.

Compromise has always benefitted the capitalists more than the workers. But today, the crisis of capitalism means that compromise is no longer possible ! The path of compromise is the road to defeat !

This is shown by the history of the present dispute :

In 1977 the Labour Government forced miners to accept a productivity deal in exchange for 'guarantees' against closures.



These 'guarantees' were forgotten, but the miners have yet to recover from the divisions sown by the productivity deal.

In 1981 the NUM called off the South Wales miners action in exchange for worthless promises from the Tory government. Scargill, as President of Yorkshire Area NUM, opposed attempts by South Wales pickets to spread the strike to Yorkshire.

In 1983 Welsh miners were again on strike against redundancies. Miners at Selby were persuaded to join the strike by Welsh pickets. The decision was overturned by NUM officials.

The overtime ban was called to 'put pressure' on the NCB to negotiate, and Scargill continues to call on the NCB to come to the negotiating table.

All these delays, all this talk of negotiations confuses the issue and weakens the strike.

The bosses don't want to 'negotiate' with the working class. They want to smash us!

In return we should make it clear that we are not prepared to negotiate or compromise. We should boldly declare that the power of the working class will *force* the bosses to give in to *all* our demands!

SEIZE CONTROL OF THE STRIKE FROM THE UNIONS

Because our ambitions must go way beyond the limited aims and methods of trade unions, control of this strike must be taken from the trade unions, into the hands of the miners themselves!

Naturally, the union leaders will do everything in their power to prevent this happening!

Miners' desire to control the strike is shown by the mass pickets outside union meetings. Miners from some pits have taken the initiative to produce their own leaflets to argue their case.

However, workers control of their strikes can only be achieved by following the example of the mass strikes in Poland — by electing delegates to strike committees from *mass assemblies*, which control *every aspect* of the strike — not just the picketing, but the demands as well.

ONE OF THE MAIN PROBLEMS AT PRESENT IS LACK OF INFORMATION. MINERS CONSTANTLY COMPLAIN THAT THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING, EVEN AT THE

COLLIERY DOWN THE ROAD. MINERS MUST DEMAND : NO SECRET MEETINGS, NO SECRET NEGOTIATIONS. BROADCAST ALL DELEGATE MEETINGS ON LOUDSPEAKERS OR RECORD THEM ON CASSETTES TO TAKE TO MASS MEETINGS OF MINERS. THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE STRIKES IN POLAND.

With this system, delegates are instantly recallable by the meetings that elect them. Workers keep direct control of their representatives and can tell toadies like Sid Vincent to get lost!

More importantly, this method of organisation does away with the division between leaders and followers, which is characteristic of both the unions and capitalist society as a whole. Workers *lead themselves* through their collective organisation, in which every worker plays a *vital and active* part.

Most important of all, the experience of *organising ourselves* in this way can give us the confidence and enthusiasm to do more than just defend ourselves : — to extend and deepen our struggles into a struggle for socialism!

FOR SOCIALISM

If the miners lose, no workers job or wage can be considered safe. But if the miners win, along with large groups of other workers, the balance of forces will be shifted decisively in favour of the working class.

But we must not confine our vision to the limited horizons of an endless struggle to defend jobs and wages. These struggles cannot be won permanently. Each has been, and will have to be *fought again and again*. Capitalism is in a state of crisis. Those who control industry, whether they represent private owners or the state, are forced to continually attack their workforces in order to compete for dwindling profits and markets. *The last world crisis led to a world war*. The failure of successive governments in all countries of the world, to solve the present crisis, shows that as long as world capitalism remains, our future is bleak.

The economic crisis is only *one* aspect of the inhumanity of capitalism.

It is a condemnation of existing society that anyone should have to do hard, boring and unhealthy work down a mine, or anywhere else, whatever the wages. Mines can now be built in which nobody works underground. In a rational society many of the jobs we are now forced to do could be wiped out straight away, and many others could be progressively eliminated through automation.

But the scientific knowledge and technical capacity, which could be used to make life worth living for the people of the world, are now used only to boost the profits and power of the ruling minority. Technical advances are not used to make life easier and more interesting, but to create redundancies, cut wages or make us work harder.

For the majority of the world, capitalism means permanent hunger and the lack of even the barest necessities of life. Famine, disease and war are ever-present for millions in Africa, Asia, South America and the Middle East.

There IS an alternative to this barbarism : **WORLD SOCIALISM**



FOR INTERNATIONAL CLASS STRUGGLE

World socialism has nothing to do with the state capitalist systems in Russia and the Eastern Bloc countries. These are called socialist in order to discredit the idea of socialism and con people into thinking that there is no alternative to the present system.

Socialism has nothing to do with the ideas of the Labour Party. The Labour Party's policy is simply to use its working class image to persuade workers to make sacrifices for the sake of the 'national economy'. But the Labour Party's tired old politics can't solve the crisis of capitalism any more than the Tories can!

The most poisonous aspect of Labour's policies is their support for nationalist policies like import controls. These policies aim to push the effects of the crisis onto workers in other countries. We must decisively *reject all nationalist policies*, and instead seek to link our struggles to those of workers in other countries.

The past year has seen a resurgence of struggles in Western Europe, as well as in North Africa, India and S.America. Public sector workers in Belgium and Holland, Rail Workers in Spain and Italy, Steelworkers and miners in France — all these workers and many others have staged mass protests and strikes recently. Many of these strikes are still going on; such as the steelworkers

strikes in France and Spain — both of them against "socialist" governments.

The papers and the TV don't tell us about these struggles because they want us to believe that we are alone. But we are *not* alone. The struggle is international. The interests of workers throughout the world are the same.

The socialism we advocate means no more economic crises, unemployment, or wage slavery, and no more wars. It is the unification of all humanity, throughout the world, no longer divided by lines on a map. It means an end to the system of the governments and bosses — their laws, prisons, armies and police. It is the common ownership and democratic control of the world's resources, with production directly to satisfy people's needs. No more empty houses and homeless people. No more 'food mountains' and starvation.

Such a society *is* possible, and the force already exists which has the power to bring it about:

this force is **THE INTERNATIONAL WORKING CLASS**

17th April 1984

This leaflet is produced by

WILDCAT c/o the Autonomy Centre, 8/10 Gt. Ancoats Street. Manchester 4, UK.

The COMMUNIST BULLETIN GROUP, Box 85, 43 Candlemakers Row, Edinburgh UK.

If you would like to help us distribute this leaflet, or want more information about our ideas and activity, please send the tear-off slip below to one of the addresses above

PUBLIC MEETING(s) ON THE MINERS STRIKE

7.45 Thursday 10th May
Town Hall Tavern
Tib Lane
Manchester 2
(Nr. Albert Square).

ALL WELCOME

Note: If the strike is called off the meeting will still take place.



To Wildcat/The Communist Bulletin Group.

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THE FIGHT MUST SPREAD

TO EVERY WORKER

Miners are NOT a special case. EVERY worker in EVERY industry, in every country, is facing the same attacks - speed-ups, falling living standards, redundancies and permanent misery on the dole. The attacks are the same throughout the working class.

THEREFORE THE FIGHTBACK MUST INVOLVE US ALL!

Hundreds of thousands of workers have shown they're not afraid to fight:

In Belgium: steelmen, dockers and firemen struck against closures and had to fight pitched battles with riot police.
In France: miners, steelmen and car workers blockaded roads tore up railway lines and burned down the French Labour Party buildings when they were faced with massive layoffs.
In India: 300,000 dockers fought to take the guns from the riot police who tried to smash their strike.

OUR STRENGTH IS SOLIDARITY

But every struggle now faces the entire force of the state. Isolation is our greatest weakness. One by one we can be picked off - like the Steelmen, the car workers and the shipyard workers over the past few years. Only by spreading and linking up the fight do we have a chance. But asking for solidarity is NOT the same as asking for charity. Dont ask other workers to take action simply to help YOU. Ask them to take action to HELP THEMSELVES.

Ask them to join the fight by STRIKING FOR THEIR OWN DEMANDS.

They're not likely to take sympathy action if they think their own jobs are at risk but they CAN be persuaded to fight for their own jobs and then LINK UP THEIR STRUGGLES WITH YOURS, with no return to work until EVERYBODY'S demands are met.

Stopping scabs just isnt enough. Even if every miner came out and joined the picket lines, the outcome of the strike, when faced with the entire weight of the state, including the army, would still be in doubt. Concentrating all the effort on the Nottingham blacklegs, on workers like the Ravenscraig steelmen who have proved they wont join you, is turning into a trap. More effort must go towards those workers who might join the fight: to the threatened shipyards, to Bathgate and Albion, to the railwaymen who have just started action against job cuts - to wherever workers face the same attacks and look likely to defend themselves.

LINK UP EVERY STRUGGLE

The Unions Will Not Spread the Struggle.

The union has led you into a cul de sac. They have insisted that the strike is simply about the mining industry. The solidarity they shout about is a false solidarity. They've asked for CHARITY, not solidarity - for financial contributions, attendance at demos, food parcels, "declarations" of support etc. They've fought to concentrate the fight on blacklegs instead of spreading it to all workers willing to join.

Ask the men who used to work at Kinneil, at Bogside and at Polmaise about the 'support' they got from the unions. Ask Scargill about his sabotage of the wildcat strikes last year, or McGahey about his ordering the miners at Solsgirth, Comrie and Seafield to go back last September.

Remember how the unions backed the Labour government attacks on workers to the hilt, organising wage-cuts, redundancies and closures all in the (capitalist) national interest. That's because like Labour, the unions are a part of the capitalist state and are always against the interests of the working class. They are not fighting in this strike for our interests. A union 'victory' will be no victory for workers. What they are fighting for is a bigger share in the running of British Capitalism, for a chance to put their Labour cronies back in power. REMEMBER THE INDUSTRIAL BUTCHERY THE LAST TIME LABOUR WERE IN POWER. ORGANISE THE STRIKE OUTSIDE THE UNION.

You can only spread this strike by taking control of it yourselves.

ELECT RECALLABLE STRIKE COMMITTEES WHICH REPORT BACK TO REGULAR MASS MEETINGS TO RUN THE PICKETING.

Don't let the unions limit action to only coal-related industries.

SEND MASS DELEGATIONS TO ANY WORKERS WHO MIGHT JOIN YOU, WHATEVER THEIR TRADE, INDUSTRY OR COUNTRY. Don't send union officials to talk to union officials.

DEMAND AN END TO SECRET NEGOTIATIONS. Follow the lead of the Polish workers and demand that ALL discussions be broadcast. Don't allow the unions to carve you up behind closed doors.

* ORGANISE YOURSELVES

* SPREAD THE STRIKE

* AGAINST THE STATE

* OUTSIDE THE UNIONS

But what we need to recognise most of all is that we can't win the fight against capitalist austerity in one factory, or one mine, or one industry - or even one country. The attack on us is world-wide and so must be our response. Such a fight must become a revolutionary fight against capitalism everywhere, linking up workers all over the capitalist world, East and West, if we are to prevent them smashing us and leading us, just as they did 40 and 70 years ago, into the butchery of World War to save their rotting system.

This leaflet is published by the Communist Bulletin Group.
We can be contacted at Box 85. 48 Candlemakers Row. EDINBURGH.

A Very Warm Autumn

in Holland

Throughout most of Autumn of last year, public life in Holland was virtually paralysed by a whole series of strikes. The government was attempting to cut salaries of civil servants, and of all employees in the public sector, councils, public transport, etc... The cuts in salaries of 3.5% were intended to ensure the success of a government policy aimed at overcoming the crisis at the expense of the working-class whilst enabling increases in profits and investments.

During the weeks and months, the trade union movement opposed this policy with little more than words. They had even announced that they would "resist" and would organise something... in the secret hope that this announcement would be enough to cause the government to retreat. Their "resistance" remained in the wings, and their hope somewhat mistaken; but there was something the bureaucrats hadn't counted on: the combativeness of their members, which took them completely by surprise.

It all started on the night of Sunday to Monday, October 16th to 17th. That night, railway workers posted up notices all over Amsterdam Central Station. These notices launched an appeal to engage in struggle. The stationmaster was informed at 3 a.m. He immediately telephoned the transport unions' office demanding collaboration and help in removing the notices. He was told that nothing could be done, because it was an unofficial strike.

The unofficial strike came as no surprise to those delegates who were too close to the base-level not to know what was going on, and not to have been aware of rank-and-file agitation. The preceding 2 weeks they had spent themselves tirelessly in the attempt to ward off an apparently inevitable battle. This work-to-rule strike unleashed itself spontaneously; base-level delegates identified with the base; the big union bosses were livid. One of those latter took a train to Amsterdam. On the Monday evening, 17 October, he held talks with the engine-drivers, trying to convince them to wait for the unions' "word of command" before embarking on anything, and that their autonomous action was premature. He talked in vain: was booed, and in the end shut up and returned to union quarters to tell his colleagues what had gone on. Shortly after this the union "recognised" the work-to-rule, but for 24 hours only; the unions' tactics being to gain time in order to put out the fire. It was a seriously bad calculation. The railway workers left them in no doubt on that score.

"If you (the trade union movement) withdraw your recognition of our struggle, we shall continue alone, and for us it will mean a break with all forms of trade unionism." So the union had a rethink; it unconditionally recognised the base-level action. Train services were completely disrupted, and before long other public services too were in complete chaos.

Drivers of local and regional buses and of trams came out on strike in the following days. These were rotating strikes whose effect combined with unanimous work-to-rule railway strike throughout all of Holland caused the virtual interruption of all public transport. The strike then spread to PTT, to street cleaners, to the Amsterdam tram lines, (rotating strike), Rotterdam trams (total strike), customs officials (work-to-rule strike), to inter city telephone communications, (jammed in spite of automation), and to other categories.

In theory, this was official action being led by the unions, but in reality it was rank-and-file action going far beyond the limits of traditional union action. Initiatives were being taken at base-level which the union bureaucracy would never of its own volition have developed. For example, the union wanted to block off only one of the lanes in the tunnel under the port of Rotterdam: the workers blocked them both off. Town Hall workers occupied the premises for only a short time, but the union denounced them immediately. The office building of the daily "De Telegraf", (which has annoyed the strikers in its reportage of their struggles) was picketed for several hours so as to prevent the paper's delivery lorries from leaving. Amsterdam exchange was occupied for several hours. The Amsterdam fire brigade turned up at the Hague with their vehicles, and drove round and round the Parliament building, picketing and spraying white carbolic. Scabs trying to keep buses and coaches moving found their vehicles immobilised.

There were similar instances during the actions in which union bosses demonstrated their hostility towards base-level developments. At one point, coach drivers in the Amsterdam area went on strike against the wishes of their union, whose attitude was that bus strikes in another area going on at the same time, were generally sufficient. Staff at the Chamber of Deputies printing press prevented ministerial documents and the Official Gazette from appearing. Crossroads in Amsterdam were brought to a standstill by various other demonstrators who stood to lose 3.5% of their salaries. Several towns were bereft of their lighting. There are but a few examples of a whole series of base-level initiatives which proved that such struggles, (and they continued in the same vein for over 6 weeks) albeit formally official were totally other than official in their character, totally different in their content. The situation is comparable with the miners strike in Britain in 1972, which had been proclaimed by the NUM executive, but which had taken on a character which frightened the union bureaucracy as much as it did the government.

Even where the unions are obliged to accept them, actions such as these have nothing in common with the traditional struggles in which there are always those who give the orders and the people who comply with them. Because such actions

in no way correspond with the rules of the bourgeois order, they present a threat to that order, not necessarily a direct and concrete threat but by all means an indirect and potential threat. At the same time, they threaten the trade union movement, which forms part of the bourgeois order. As a former minister was absolutely right in stating, "The trade union movement had even more to lose than the government."

The truth of this, and the combativeness of the workers, explains the trade unions' attitude. It's not difficult to understand the divergences and nuances which exist within this attitude. The more committed the rank-and-file of a union was for all out action, the more importance and power did that rank-and-file assume, and the more radical was that union obliged to appear. It was abundantly clear to observers of those struggles that the leader of one of the largest unions involved in the conflict was a man of absolute integrity and honesty in his attitude as a worker (which can't be said about all trade union leaders). Yet it was this same radical leader of integrity (who was insulted and vilified by the entire Dutch "rightwing"

press) who - no doubt unwillingly - "rescued" the Government. It was his radicalisation which helped restore the rank-and-file's trust in the union; and this trust prevented them from continuing the fight after the tribunals set up by the government, after 6 weeks of strike had forbidden its continuance. In England, in 1972 and also later on, workers went beyond the decisions concerning social relations which the tribunal had reached in accordance with the Ind. Rel. Act. In Holland in 1983 there were demonstrating scenes when the unions announced to their rank-and-file that the struggle was not going

to be continued. And yet the rank-and-file obeyed these union directives precisely because such directives had been able to appear to be encompassing working-class demands and concerns, during the preceding weeks. It seemed paradoxical; but the social reality is full of such paradoxes. It was the leader's radicalism which saved the government. At the same time it can be said that in the end the stubborn attitude of the government presented any real compromise (the only proposal, to cut salaries by 3% instead of 3.5% meant very little indeed). The result was that whilst the unions had been forced to continue the struggle, they had not had to yield to the temptation of distancing themselves from the base-level, thereby losing face.

There were articles at the time in the Dutch press which maintained that Prime Minister Heath had lost the battle with the English miners in 1974 because he had stuck firmly to his positions, and because the English unions were more combative than the Dutch. This was a double error: Heath did not dig his heels in over his positions: on the contrary, he retreated from them several times, notably in 1972 before the working-class.

In 1974, he could retreat no further because his back was up against the wall. He was defeated by the entire English working-class struggling autonomously in a "wildcat" fashion.

In Holland in 1983, the situation was exactly the reverse: in the course of an "official" struggle there were strong (and even very strong) autonomous tendencies at the base-level: but at the decisive moment the masses did not break through the barrier which separates the bourgeois order from the proletarian order.

(from Echanges et Mouvements 39. who can be contacted at BM Box 91 London WC1N 3XV)

subscribe!

This issue of the Communist Bulletin is the fifth to be printed rather than duplicated, a process we have been able to use since our purchase of an offset litho machine. Recently we have also been able to augment our stock of golfball typewriters. (If any reader has access to spare golfballs we would be more than grateful.)

This issue also marks both the rise in the number of issues printed to cater for our increased subscription list and the increasing availability of bookshop outlets both in Britain Europe and North America.

All this has meant, however that we can no longer keep the price of the Bulletin at 30p. Thus this issue costs 50p as will all subsequent issues. Existing subscriptions will be honoured but all new subscriptions will be at the rate of £4.00 or foreign equivalent post paid in cash or blank postal orders. (we have no account in the name either of the CBG or Bulletin. Contact us at our group address.

Box 85. 43 Candlemakers Row. Edinburgh. U.K.

LEBANON

25.

Soft Spot on Western Bloc's Armour

The present crisis in Lebanon cannot be separated from the inexorable decay of the global capitalist system. The most recent fighting -- the gruesome and massive destruction and death around Beirut -- is an essential part of the diseased body politic of imperialism; east must battle west for world domination.

An undisguised, but probably temporary, setback for the Western bloc has taken place. The withdrawal of the "Multi-National Peacekeeping Forces" and the collapse of the American-sponsored Lebanese Army must be seen not as the product of objective realities, or the cleverness of Syrian policy, but as an inability of the Reagan administration to make sufficient use of its newly dealt and high strategic cards in the region. For the short term, the opportunity to solidify a united front against the dwindling Soviet bloc proxies has been lost.

However the retreat in Lebanon must be counter-balanced by the geo-political and military advances of the U.S. bloc in other parts of the world and the overall defensive posture of Russian Imperialism per se. Since the last benchmark of the descent of the world capitalist system ('81-'82), the US ruling class has succeeded in shunting the main burden of hardship onto its less powerful European allies and the main debtor countries of the "Third World". This illusion of "recovery" has then given some partial ideological credence to American military expansion against the (other) "Evil Empire".

Outside of El Salvador, the US has gained ground in the Caribbean and Central America with its establishment of a permanent military outpost in Honduras the re-arming of Guatemala, the encirclement of Nicaragua and the gobbling up of Grenada. Passage of the Kissinger report recommendations -- huge influxes of economic and military aid -- will neutralise the Central American "problem" for the moment. Meanwhile both the Sandanistas and the El Salvador Left have come to understand that North American Imperialism is no "paper tiger" and are now crying uncle. With their smiling Stalinist faces, the ruling bureaucratic honchos of the F.S.L.N. and the F.M.L.N. are ready, and have been for some time, to either secure or get more adhesion to the hangman's rope of State-power over the proletariat.

Eastern bloc ventures into Chad and Namibia by Soviet surrogates Libya and Angola/Mozambique have been checked by France and South Africa respectively. Moscow influence in Iran -- the Tudeh Party -- is being physically liquidated as a just reward for its fidelity to the Mullah regime. The recent upsurge of war along the Iran-Iraq border is best seen as an insane result of small imperialist competition for control of the Strait of Hormuz, with the patriotism of the state and Islam as the prime movers of death. The Russians are further bogged down in Afghanistan and Ethiopia, with severe economic problems in Vietnam and Cuba as well as shortages within its own continental satellites. NATO's new Pershing II and Cruise missiles have now been deployed only scant minutes from the Kremlin.

Despite the failure of the Reagan Administration to pacify the discord in Lebanon, the West continues to hold a potentially winning hand there. The 1982 Israeli invasion north removed one Russian pawn -- the Palestine Liberation Organisation --

from the area and subsequent events forced this statist body to split into pro-Western (Arafat) and pro-Soviet (Abu Saleh) factions. 'Moderate' Arab powers -- Saudi Arabia, Egypt Jordan Iraq and now the Arafat-PLO have been brought closer together, Egypt has been recently reinstated as a member of the Islamic Conference Organisation; the former and Jordan are about to receive massive shipments of modern armaments from America. With a little smooth power-brokerage -- of which the Reagan Administration is short on -- this new Arab combine could reach a modus vivendi with Israel and thereby congeal a uniform face against both Syria and Islamic fundamentalist irrationalism.

That this new situation has borne no fruit for a solution to Palestine or Lebanon merely underscores the ineptness of American (Schultz') foreign policy to adequately pressure Begin/Shamir and Gemayel for strategic compromises. Military options have been reflexively placed in the forefront where political and economic carrots, like the Kissinger plan for Central America, should have been in the offing. (and with the Saudi treasury to pay the bill.) It's conjectural at this point whether the American bourgeoisie might actually prefer a more skilled diplomatic management, a new team -- say a Gary Hart -- in the White House for 1984, with the unions and Jesse Jackson's "Rainbow Coalition" still outside of power.

All the same a certain ideological profit has already accrued to the West from the constant televised pictures of inevitable fighting and human suffering (ie "war is coming and nothing can be done"), and the patriotism element in the deployment and funeral scenes of the US marines in Lebanon. The firing of the 16-inch guns of the New Jersey, the only active battleship in the world, is an apt image of the future of capitalist ruination if the proletariat fails to expunge at last the putrid system of wage labour and profit expansion.

But lets take a look at the actual Middle East scorecard, the events and players of the past two years.

In June 1982 with Alexander Haig at the helm of US foreign policy the Israeli Army under then Defence Minister Ariel Sharon was given the green light to strike into Lebanon with hopes of knocking out two Soviet surrogates -- the PLO and the Syrian Army. This attempt to achieve a "strategic consensus" was initially successful: the Syrian airforce and ground defences were wiped out; the PLO was pushed back to Beirut, bombarded for 30 days and forced to evacuate from Lebanon by sea. The first contingent of US marines was sent into Beirut during August '82 to supervise the removal of the Palestinian militia. The political supremacy of the pro-western Christian Maronite Phalange Party was thus guaranteed by Israel (ie. American) force-of-arms.

On September 1st, Reagan announced a plan to implement what then seemed possible -- an Israeli compromise on the West Bank and Gaza and a political state for Arafat and Co. in conjunction with Jordan. But newly-elected Lebanese President Bashir Gemayel, the Jose Antonio of the Maronite Militia was assassinated and replaced by his more urbane but less ruthless brother Amin. Several days later 900 Palestinian civilians were massacred in the Sabra and Chatila

refugee camps by Israeli sponsored Christian troops under Saad Haddad. The marines were sent back to Beirut in late September '82, ostensibly as a 'peace-keeping force'. Troops from other major Western Bloc countries - France, Italy and Britain, were duly added.

During this time the Reagan administration failed to follow through with its own political initiative, to press Israel to back off from the West Bank and pull out of Lebanon in concert with Syria. Yasir Arafat travelled to Amman to confer with Jordan's King Hussein, author of the Palestinian Black September slaughter; the former now appeared to be cozying up to a western-made solution to the "Palestinian question". This new attraction, however, was against the stated ideological wishes of both the PLO Executive Committee and the Arab League resolution on Palestine.

In the meantime Syria began to rearm itself. A \$2 Billion package of weapons was obtained from Russia, including new, advanced surface-to-air missiles, a computerised ground control system, more artillery and tanks and 7000 Russian military advisors and technicians. Syria then proceeded to galvanise and arm PLO members in the Bekaa Valley disenchanted

On May 17th 1983 an Israel-Lebanon accord was concluded between the Begin and Gemayel governments calling for the withdrawal of the Israeli army and the security of the latter's northern border. But the Maronite faction of the Lebanese bourgeoisie has made no political concessions to the disenfranchised Shiite Muslims and Druze; neither had Syria been consulted. The central government continued to be locked into the 1943 political covenant which legally guaranteed Christian predominance, smething which no longer reflected population realities. Syria then began to give military supplies to these disgruntled groups as well. The Lebanese opposition, Druze, Shiite, and Sunni moslems, demanded its fair share of State Power and the profits from commerce, banking, finance and real estate that such representation might bring in. This prospect, with all cover-measures of religion devotion and snctimony, "self-determination" or whatever, is in truth what the militiamen of Nabih Nerri's Amal and Walid Jumblatt's "Progreessive Socialist Party" are fighting and dying for. From an article in the Feb.9th 1984 New York Times we find the following lines:

"The security committee statement issued over the state-run Beirut radio, now under the influence of the bands of West



U.S. Marines Leave Beirut. Testament to the Failure of U.S. Plans for Lebanon.

with the moderating Arafat. But Syria's imperialist ambitions were always, like Rodney Dangerfield, limited to "getting respect", to retrieve the Golan Heights from Israel and to re-establish the Lebanon as its traditional satrapy. Hafez al Assad, the Butcher of Hama, simply wants to be the Godfather of the Arab world. The Reagan administration, true to its own self-image, doesn't seem to be able to recognise every particular chessman on the table.

Beirut militias, also declared that as of Thursday (Feb 9th), "all police duties in West Beirut will be handled by remaining elements of the government's internal security force." It warned gunmen against any violation of private property or theft of government or army equipment."

Such are the radical politics of the "National Salvation Front."

In September Begin resigned as Israeli Prime Minister and was replaced by fellow Irgun terrorist Yitzhak Shamir. As their occupation army continued to take casualties from guerrilla assaults the Labor Party and "Peace Now" oppositions within Israel made headway. The economy was in a shambles: inflation ran at 140% during 1983, the foreign debt was at \$22 billion. Strikes inside the country were intensifying and the Shamir government, recognising its inability to jibe its military occupation with its new domestic austerity was forced to withdraw its troops south from the Shouf mountains to the Awali river. The Shouf area then became a hotbed of vicious military contention between the Christian Phalange/Lebanese army and the Druze militias supported by Syria.

It was during this period that US naval gunfire was first used on behalf of the Gemayel government troops. On October 23rd 1983 the American and French marines paid the price of imperialist exchange with 300 dead after a suicide truck bombing. Peace talks began in November in Vienna but the Christian faction gave no concrete ground to their Muslim and Druze adversaries. Again the Reagan administration failed to press home the need for political compromise to the Maronite chieftains.

Also in November the open rebellion against the Arafat-PLO led by Abu Saleh and Abu Musa, with material and propaganda support from Syria and Libya, stepped up. The former's irregulars were pushed out of the Bekaa valley and back to the northern Lebanese port-city of Tripoli. Again Arafat was entrapped and saved only by his new Western bloc friends, Greece and France. Despite the strong array of pro-western stitches - Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, the Israeli Left and now Arafat - the Reagan administration was unable to sew up the open wounds of either Palestine or Lebanon. Massive doses of military aid were given instead to all of the US' clients in the area. But the Americans proved unable to parlay their military clout with political puissance vis-a-vis the recalcitrance of the Christian Phalange or the Zionist Herut. As in El Salvador the US-trained Lebanese battalions were shown to be hollow in the face of political realities - the absence of real bourgeois democracy in Lebanon.

While all this was happening the North American Left once again revealed itself to be totally incapable of any programmatic class analysis of the Middle East area: they can grasp nothing, or what's a modernist for? The position of the majority of these liberal ghouls is the ritual of Third World Guilt - they cross themselves every time they read the initials PLO. Pertaining to the Druze, the very words "Progressive" and "Socialist" alone make them shit (EDB-laced) blueberry muffins! Some of the more

extreme trotskyist morons like the Spartacist League can see Lebanon only in terms of tribal, feudalist warfare instead of understanding the profound bourgeois nature of all the political structures of the ethnic groups grappling for statist economic power. And then there's the various anarcho-idiots and Cardanites (usually one and the same) who skip along behind the Left with their own "US out of" pink lavender and green signs...anything but authentic Red and Black (Right"Maxine"?). We also shouldn't forget the anti-Zionist obsessionism of one Joffre Stewart and his Father Coughlin crusade against the most-unholy state of Israel. For the Wagnerian nuisance Stewart and likewise his equally jocular soft "anarchist" opponents hatred of the state becomes an exclusively subjective matter (as with everything else in this milieu) - some are worse (Israel for example) than others (Nicaragua for example). But all are agreed, including the devotees of the San Francisco ideology of "Anti-Authoritarianism", to maintain the institutionalized and global state of affairs of capitalism.

This past month (February 1984) has shown that the sectarian form of the Lebanese State and Army prevented it from becoming a sharpened claw of Western appetites in the area. Now surrounded by his capitalist rivals, Amin Gemayel appears amenable to a deal with Syria's Assad; like a Beirut Huey Long he will now "share the power" and thereby keep his Kingfish title.

All the while the television networks, first level instruments of bourgeois domination and mystification have conveyed thousands of hours of pictures of death and misery, terror and helplessness, which is meant to demoralise the world working class and oil the propaganda machinery for eventual WWII.

However the capitalist solution to this epoch's world-historic crisis is not a foregone conclusion. Freedom, that is to say libertarian communism, still hangs in the balance. As the big strike waves in Italy, Belgium, Holland, France, West Germany and Spain over the past year have broadcast, all decisive class confrontations have yet to occur and can only occur in Western Europe, at the centre and not the periphery of world capital. Workers' combativity in the metropolises (including the US - Phelps Dodge and Greyhound strikes) is on the rise and it is predominantly these forces which can develop a revolutionary perspective for the end of the old alienated and the beginnings of the new humanized world order. This can only be done through the collective class (the Workers Councils)^{*} elimination of both the nation-state apparatus (Bakunin) and the wages-commodity-profit system (Marx).

Tampa Workers Affinity Group.
February 1984.

*See the following article for the debate between the CBG and TWAG on the question of Marxism versus 'Libertarian Communism' etc.

In issues 5 and 6 of the Communist Bulletin readers can find a major two-part article on the Middle East

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A Response by Tampa Workers Affinity Group to our Analysis of the Organisational Question.

Tampa Workers Affinity Group would like to contribute this detailed answer to the two articles by the Aberdeen comrades on the problem of revolutionary organisation. *

First of all we would like to state that we are in full agreement with their observation that the 1981 organisational scandals and turmoil within the International Communist Current has thrust into relief the need for a completely fresh re-politicization of the organisational question. The Bulletin no 1 has accurately pointed out that the bureaucratic deformation and tyranny of the ICC has rendered considerable damage to the liberatory integrity of our contemporary communist movement. (The same goes for the nefarious organisational manipulations and expulsions by the FOR in 1980-82.) And that,

Everything the ICC struggled to achieve on the question of the need for a centralized, international party, on the question of sectarianism and monolithism stands in danger of being wiped out, of being revealed as hot air, a front, a fake. This stomach turning, unspeakable action has brought the spectre of Stalinism back into the heart of the proletarian movement.

We cannot concur more with these sentiments and we totally support the Aberdeen comrades' conclusions about the "Chenier affair", etc. Also we cannot but praise these comrades for their self-reliance and honesty in trying to re-think the whole meaning of these events - their implications for a theory and practice of genuine revolutionary organisation. In fact, while we have especially strong criticisms to make of these two essays, we felt that their third part - the conclusion - was the best portion of their analysis. Our own position on the party is very close to that of Gorter and the later Luxemburg (of Spartakusbund), and we agree with Aberdeen as to the current weakness, isolation and meagreness of the real forces of world proletarian revolution. And that,

While we remain small and isolated, the pressure towards monolithism, family cliques and sect-like behaviour must be enormous. Our priorities must be a fraternal husbanding of our strength, of reaching out and embracing as much of the revolutionary milieu as possible, while at the same time reconciling that with a method of organisation which allows and promotes a rigorous search for clarity.

Keeping in mind this necessary spirit of revolutionary solidarity, as well as the obvious sincerity of the Aberdeen comrades, we must now criticise what we believe is their boarding of a

wayward historical and political train - a most decrepit and insidious locomotive - the Bolshevik Party.

At the outset we must assume that the Bulletin comrades may be somewhat sceptical and leery as to our 'party' credentials after our "General Pronouncement on the ICC Controversy" and our relentless attack on Lenin with our subsequent long reply to the Current on "Social Democracy and the Russian Revolution". And while it's true that our hatred for and aversion to bureaucratic domination leads us to verbal extremes, we must again insist that our orientation on the revolutionary organisation is almost indistinguishable from that of Pannekoek and Gorter; but unlike the ICC and like the Aberdeen comrades we really mean it! Here as well, our opinion of the eclectic Ultra Left Review is parallel to that of our Scottish colleagues - that the journal and its notion is pretty atrocious, a watered down version of the now defunct International Discussion Bulletin, with the only lucid remarks coming from the ex-ICC people and to a lesser extent, Wildcat. For our part, here in the US, the Tampa comrades are planning to take some initial measures, possibly in conjunction with FOCUS, towards a principled and formal reunification of all combative council and libertarian communist elements in North America. Of course, this must be done minus the academic lassitude and self satisfaction of Root and Branch style groups, or the miserable and opportunist Social Democracy with a libertarian flavour of the sundry anarcho-Cardanists here in the States.

The main trouble we have with the Aberdeen comrades' attempt to re-examine the organisational question, and their intrinsic condemnation of the ICC's bureaucratism, is their seeming inability to confront this problem at its genesis: the debates and contretemps of the First International.

Time and time again, every contribution of the central organs to the debate, even their opening contributions to debates which had not been defined, let alone matured, was considered to be the ICC position which had to be defended against 'dissidents'. Any notion that the central organs should be the expression and synthesis of the organisation as a whole was completely absent. For the ICC 'clarity' is produced by the internal life of the central organs: certainly the rank and file are free to say what they like in an endless flood of internal bulletins but all of this is worthless in the face of central organs who treat it like a school master [which, by the way, M.C. is!] treats his pupils' essays, "six out of ten, must try harder".

But does not this assertion recall the haughty attitudes of Marx and Engels themselves in the First International (and even earlier in the Communist League) and to which the membership gathered around Bakunin fiercely resisted, as the

*Another Look at the Organisation Question in Bulletin.2.

Aberdeen comrades now do themselves against the ICC apparatus?

Instead of chronologically investigating the reasons behind the rupture of the First International, or scrutinizing the evolution of European Social Democracy, or looking at any large anarcho-syndicalist organisation like the Spanish CNT, the Aberdeen comrades move out of historical sync and latch onto the Bolsheviks. While we can understand that almost every present member of the revolutionary milieu - and especially those coming from an exclusively Marxian perspective - has much familiarity with the Russian Revolution and its political parties, we must interpret the Aberdeen focus on the Bolsheviks as too convenient, as an axial error: this is surely not the place to sort out anything positive about the communist democracy of the revolutionary organisation.

We have to note two underlying and recurrent threads of their texts: 1) a tendency towards projecting their own (unstated) libertarian intentions onto the practice of the Bolsheviks, and 2) a tendency to directly name and compliment Lenin whenever something is considered admirable, and to defer to "the Central Committee" or "the Party" whenever something is considered derogatory (thereby absolving Lenin of any personal responsibility).

Going on to the actual texts, the Aberdeen comrades insist that,

It's necessary to realize that Lenin's starting point was the ceaseless fight against opportunism of a Social Democracy rapidly moving into the camp of the bourgeoisie. Lenin's fight for an elitist, vanguard party drawn narrowly from the ranks of professional revolutionaries has to be set against this background of the fight against conceptions of organisation with their roots in a period which was rapidly passing and which would eventually have to be jettisoned.

Should have been "jettisoned" altogether to begin with, we might add! For us, Lenin's "organisational mistakes" of the 1902-04 period were not part of a "fight against opportunism", but opportunism in another guise. You see, it was simply not in the cards for Lenin, or anyone else in the R.S.D.P. for that matter, to define fundamentally the origins of Social Democratic reformist decay, because they themselves were already deeply tainted and infected with this disease! One must remember that Lenin's political and intellectual mentors were Plekhanov and Kautsky - the very architects of Second International idealogical degeneration and betrayal - and that the former assimilated body and soul all of the false representational, objectivist and scientific theorems of Kautsky and Co. at the time of his (Lenin's) own intellectual development. Also, recall that all these shared a common, middle-class background with much of the authoritarian substrate that this implies, sociological subtleties notwithstanding. The only difference between Kautsky and Lenin was this: that the latter was the former, only with balls! The Aberdeen comrades should take note that the real explanations for the apostasy of Social Democracy have been given by Karl Korsch, Anton Pannekoek and Guy Debord, among others.

Concerning Lenin's imperative "military discipline" within the party and of "All Power to the Central Committee", the text tries to soften Ulyanov's ruthlessness by quoting an academic (Liebman):

Yet nothing about the Bolshevik organisation as it actually existed at that time, justified Trotsky in talking of a dictatorship [?] ... True, there was no internal democracy in the R.S.D.P. of that time, but this fact was quite unconnected with Leninism. In their day to day practice there was little to choose in this respect between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks: down to the revolution of 1905 they both employed the same methods in which co-option of leaders was the rule and election the exception.

Sure and now the substitutionist cat is let out of the bag! This quote speaks volumes on the nature of "Marxism" in Russia! And, incidentally, just how do the Aberdeen comrades explain the intensity, the thunderbolts of the Iskra row? Merely Trotsky's youthful impetuosity? No, comrades, one cannot blind oneself to what Trotsky and others saw in Ilyich's personality make-up even as early as 1904: "Bonapartist" and "dictator".

Then in 1905 "all is changed". A democratic passage from Lenin is duly conjured up:

The St Petersburg workers' Social Democrats know that the whole Party organisation is now built on a democratic basis [since when?]. This means that all the Party members take part in the election of officials, committee members and so forth, that all the Party members discuss and decide questions concerning political campaigns of the proletariat and that all the Party members determine the line of tactics of the Party organisation.

For Aberdeen, "It was clear to Lenin that in the ferment of class struggle on such a scale, that the rules of membership appropriate to the fight against the opportunism of the old Social Democracy, constituted a barrier between the party and its relationship to the class". Exactly, because without such a tactical turn and such rhetoric, why or how would the insurgent workers even listen to him or join his party? From our point of view, this new policy is nothing but an ingenious ploy, a clever gambit, a patented manoeuvre at which Lenin is the master, and which he will make again and again on his road to State Power!

And what of the Bolshevik Party's initial response to the Petrograd mass strikes cited by the Aberdeen comrades themselves?

The Petersburg Committee of the Bolsheviks was frightened at first by such an innovation as a non-partisan representation of the embattled masses, and could find nothing better to do than present the Soviet with an ultimatum: immediately adopt a Social Democratic programme or disband! The Petersburg Soviet as a whole, including the contingent of Bolshevik workmen as well, ignored this ultimatum without batting an eyelash. (Trotsky-Stalin)

In other words, SUBMIT IMMEDIATELY TO THE SOCIALIST FATHERLAND! But the Aberdeen comrades see no connection between Lenin's 1905 Bolsheviks and Kronstadt - it's merely our deluded 'libertarian' imagination. "Poor undialectical fellows."

The Aberdeen text always wants to see a beneficent Lenin, something which just isn't there.

[It] wasn't any question either of the workers being recruited as cannon fodder. At the 3rd Congress in 1905, Lenin is arguing for bringing workers onto the committee in a ratio of 8 workers to 2 intellectuals. By November he's calling that 'obsolete' and demanding a ratio of several hundred to every single intellectual! There's a clear understanding also that this opening up of the party means a change in structure and functioning.

And the result? Since when did Lenin, Zinoviev, Kamenev or Krasin ever stand aside to make room for revolutionary workers? Talk is cheap, comrades! Then, with the reflux of the class movement in Russia, we see the real Lenin re-emerge:

However, the years of reaction which followed the collapse of the 1905 revolution saw the return of monolithism and sectarianism with a vengeance to the Bolshevik party. The call now was "Strengthen the Organisation" which meant in reality "strengthen the Central Committee" [what else]. The drive within the party was for absolute homogeneity and adherence to the "party line". The constitutional guarantees for minorities and free discussion, though formally still in existence, were abandoned in practice. It was during this period of viciousness and unscrupulousness in polemics which wouldn't be surpassed until the Party of the Counter-Revolution, with Lenin for example accusing Martov of being "objectively in the service of the Tsar's police".

What this passage does, in actuality, is to sum up, almost in exactitude, the reprehensible antics of the ICC during the 1981 "Chenier affair"! The Current's leaders are the loyal students of, not deviants from, the execrable and nefarious organisation canons of the Bolsheviks and especially Ilyich himself!

Then the myth of the "democratic" Bolsheviks is again prestidigitated for 1919. "The party once again flung itself open to the working class, growing ten-fold in less than a year. The monolithic and sectarian practices of the years of reaction, the years of rigid obedience to the 'party line' and the dictates of a hierarchical centralism were shrugged off as if they had never existed."

What do you mean, "as if they never existed"? This kind of fantastic reasoning might be o.k. for mystics, but not for communist revolutionaries. Lenin's organisational methods, his disciplinary spirit and aura, his chain-of-command mentality, which Luxemburg had early and rightly excoriated, would never leave the inner mechanics of the Bolshevik Party! This query again - when did the party hierarchy ever resign in deference to the development of consciousness by the workers themselves: in February, in March, in July, or the 'squealers' in October 1917? How did the composition of the Party change fundamentally? When was the inner circle around Lenin, of which STALIN was a senior partner, ever get removed from organisational authority?

Throughout this period the debates were fierce, open and public on almost every major issue from the difference of opinion over the July days, through the debates on the seizure of power, to the polemics over Brest-Litovsk,

etc. The Brest-Litovsk debates, for example, took place in the pages of Pravda and even when the decision had been made, the Siberian Party organisation refused to recognise the signing of the Treaty.

And just how many of these debates did Lenin ever lose, even when his position was in sharp minority within the 'Party', much less in revolutionary Russia itself? And precisely how did the Brest issue resolve itself? Isn't it true that Lenin threatened to resign if the war faction won, and that he used personal intimidation against the Left Communists - Bukharin, Radek, Kollontai, Lunarcharsky, Ryazanov, etc (viz, the party intellectuals) - all of whom cowered before stern Vladimir? In the meantime, all of the other forces of revolution in Russia - the Left Social Revolutionaries, the Anarchists, the Maximalists - wanted indefatigable class war against German imperialism, as a direct way of sparking the workers revolution in Germany! But, curiously, Lenin's will prevailed; his capitulationist policy carried the day and the world-historical debacle of the class then began to set in. Here was the acid test of Party democracy and internationalism, and the Bolsheviks failed it miserably circa February 1918.

The Aberdeen text then goes on to quote J. Molyneux:

In reality, the history of Bolshevism is a history of the struggle of factions. And indeed, how could a genuinely revolutionary organisation setting itself the task of overthrowing the world and uniting under its banner the most audacious iconoclasts, fighters and insurgents, live and develop without intellectual conflicts, without groupings and temporary factional formations?

This statement forgets to mention that all of these "iconoclasts, fighters and insurgents" were in total agreement on the overriding commandment to seize, exercise and hold fast to state power, and of these, Lenin was the most far-sighted and determined of all!

Then the article makes a very careless slip from an unidentified source (which is probably Trotsky): "In the heat of the battle, when the proletarian army is straining every nerve, no criticism whatever can be permitted in its ranks." No criticisms? Of what, of whom? And by whom? Carry out blindly the directives of the Party-State!?!

"What also has to be grasped is the degree to which the emergence and functioning of tendencies wasn't a product of the theoretical clarity of the central organs [Surely!], but was fundamentally the product of the pressure and influence coming from the lower ranks of the Party who were closest to the class." This is our position exactly! "As much as anything, the formal guarantee of minority rights was not so much more than a reluctant recognition of a de facto situation which couldn't be changed." Right, and certainly no thanks to Illych! "The opening up of the Party to the class swept away the monolithic tendencies and the hierarchical respect for the central organs which in any case was much less substantial than is usually imputed." Really? And the Party cult of Lenin? And the Cheka? And the rapid sealing off of democratic rights beginning in early 1918? The Aberdeen comrades can't seriously expect the contemporary revolutionary movement to believe

this for one second can they? Yes, the "monolithic tendencies" may have diminished for a few months during the period of Bolshevik consolidation of state power, but any commitment to workers' democracy, to REAL SOVIET POWER, was then abruptly nullified because this kind of authoritarianism and substitutionism is de jure Leninism!

Then the Petrograd Military Organisation of the Bolsheviks is cited as an example of an organ of class autonomy. "During the July Days when the Central Committee was calling for calm, the military organisation used its press to call for action." (And this is also the Tampa comrades position on the July days.) "After the July days the Central Committee tried to exert control and despatch Stalin to insist that their decisions must be carried out without discussion. He was bluntly informed that this was 'quite unacceptable' and the Central Committee had to retreat with as much grace as it could muster. During the same period, the Petrograd Committee demanded its own press because of the timorousness of Pravda and when the Central Committee refused, it went blithely ahead with acquiring a publishing company and press." "Central Committee"? You mean Lenin, don't you? And Ol' Koba was merely carrying out the orders of patriarchal master Ilych! You can't name one and not the other!

The text then again talks of organisational tension between the base and apex of the party. But we repeat, this "dialectical interplay" existed in spite of, rather than at the behest of, Lenin, who, naturally, as always would have preferred that everything be done unquestionally and bureaucratically 'his way'.

What stands out above all is the total falseness of the myth that the Bolshevik Party was a well oiled monolith, founded in the disciplined implementation of an infallible and invariant blueprint drawn up in 1902. With this myth as a starting point any attempt to draw the appropriate lessons for the period is bound to be doomed to disaster. On the one hand we have the libertarians who mechanically connect Kronstadt to 1902, and on the other hand we have the Bordigists who equally mechanically draw a line from 1902 to 1917.

Comrades, the plane of travel for Lenin and Co. is concretely just such a straight one: subordination of all else to the exigency of wresting State Power. The Bolshevik Party was held together internally on the basis of Lenin's dominant personality, and externally by the central apparatus with its intellectualist, pseudo-vanguard liturgy. Here we find the invisible bond, the psychological glue which held the Party machine intact, right or wrong. The Aberdeen comrades themselves have indeed seen such a machine (or guillotine) at work - the ICC!

"In the ICC we have an organisation which prides itself smugly on the rejection of the monolithism of Bolshevik democratic centralism. But in reality it has created a monolithic practice of all-powerful central organs beyond the wildest dreams of Lenin at his most centralised." Just the opposite! The ICC in its wildest dreams, in its subconscious reflexes, could never match or wield the material and demiurgic power of Lenin in his element! And the convulsive splits within the ICC and the healthy revulsion to M.C. and Co. by the Aberdeen comrades themselves proves this, and also confirms obliquely that the revolutionary

class has historically inoculated itself - even if only semi-consciously - from all such authoritarian abuse. We simply won't stand for it, from whatever quarter!

About growth and mergers with other political currents by the Bolsheviks, the Aberdeen comrades must mean some of Lenin's old friends (Lunacharsky) and adversaries (Trotsky) of the Inter-Organisational Borough who were brought in and elevated to positions of importance; or maybe ex-soldiers like Krylenko and Dybenko to the extent that they possessed technical, military skills and learned well how to execute the 'party line'.

We have already said in this text that in one sense the history of the Bolshevik party can be seen as the history of the fight for the autonomy of working class interests and their espousal of that can't be separated from the form of their organisational work - their emphasis on factory work as opposed to Parliamentary manoeuvres, etc. Their achievement of clarity is both a result of, and dialectically, a cause of, their implantation in the heart of the class, in combination with the massive and real freedom of debate which existed in the Party and which, at the vital points in the struggle, frequently went against its centralized authority.

"Frequently went against its centralized authority"? When? Where? How? What line formulated by Lenin was ever rejected on a Party basis, with or without internal or public discussion? Just look at it: the April Theses, July days, the Insurrection, the assumption of State Power, the nationalisation decrees, the Cheka, the Vesenka, the Red Army, Brest-Litovsk, the suppression of socialist parties, militarisation of Labour, right on down the pike to you know where!

We must repeatedly stress that Lenin could never grasp the reasons for the collapse of the Social Democracy because his own ideology and organisation were an integral part and continuation of that collapse. And when Korsch succeeded in ferreting out the philosophic roots of reformist miasma with his Marxism and Philosophy, he and his exposition were calumniated and suppressed by the Third International, and no less an arrogant and cowardly bureaucrat than the slinky Zinoviev called Korsch a "wildeklein-burger". Let the revolutionary movement decide for itself who was the real petty-bourgeois gone mad: Korsch or Ilych!

The second text by Aberdeen more or less covers the same ground as the first and it would be redundant to answer each and every point again. What we would like to conclude with is a plea to our Scottish comrades to cut the umbilical cord to Lenin because whoever does not will eventually gag on its rancid fluids. The class instincts of the Aberdeen comrades are sound, even if erroneously they project them onto a party where it simply just doesn't correspond. Let us then advance with the arduous task of constructing our New International without hoary illusions, and in which the quality of the revolutionary movement itself is the main guarantee of its emancipatory, communist integrity.

The CBG's texts on the Bolshevik Party have provoked interest and discussion within the milieu. With the exception of the present text, however, this interest has not been expressed in writing. This makes particularly welcome the contribution from the Tampa Workers Affinity Group. But there is a second reason why we welcome Tampa's critique. They put into words an analysis of the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik Party which is very common in today's movement. Unlike the CBG, Tampa holds the view that the Bolshevik Party was a bourgeois organisation and that the October revolution in Russia was a bourgeois counter-revolution.

This analysis is the touchstone for all those groups and individuals who call themselves variously libertarian communists, anarcho-communists or council communists. While we have many positions in common with this part of the milieu (the nature of trade unions, national liberation struggles, parliamentarism, etc) and we would include Tampa within this, the evaluation of the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks has a fundamental importance for the nature and functions of revolutionary organisations and poses a barrier to further discussion and co-operation.

Our framework

Let us begin by making our analysis clear and elaborating the framework which informs the original CBG texts. We hold firmly to the view that the Bolshevik Party was a revolutionary organisation which made an important contribution to the revolutionary wave of the early part of this century and that the revolution of October 1917 in Russia was a proletariat revolution which smashed the bourgeois state and instituted the political power of the working class.

To back up our view we would point to a whole history of analyses and interventions by the Bolshevik Party which could only be made by a revolutionary organisation: to the political critique which the Bolsheviks made of the Mensheviks and the other elements of the degenerating Second International, to their denunciation of the first world war and their call to turn the imperialist war into a civil war, Lenin's contribution to the Zimmerwald and Kienthal conferences of groups opposed to the war, and Lenin's April theses in the aftermath of the February revolution. We can quote here the declaration of the first congress of the Third International which shows that the Bolsheviks, who were the moving force behind the International, had a global view of the revolution and not one restricted to Russia.

Our task is to generalize the revolutionary experience of the working class, to purge the movement of the corroding admixture of opportunism and social-patriotism, to unify the efforts of all genuinely revolutionary parties of the world proletariat and thereby facilitate and hasten the victory of the Communist revolution throughout the world.

Equally we could point to the views of the Bolsheviks' contemporaries who had no doubts, whatever their criticisms, of the nature of the Bolshevik Party - and to the way in which all revolutionaries of that time, including many anarcho-syndicalists, acclaimed the October

revolution and rallied to the banner of the Third International.

We could have gone on from this framework to write a completely different article from the ones we published. We could have examined the mistakes and errors of the Bolsheviks and how these weaknesses contributed to the defeat of the Russian proletariat. But this kind of critique has not been exactly neglected over the last fifty years. We have many good analyses of the Bolsheviks' and Lenin's substitutionism, of the July days in 1917, of Brest-Litovsk and of Kronstadt. These critiques began with the opposition tendencies in the Bolshevik Party itself and continued through the German, Dutch, Italian and other Lefts. While today we have the living proof in the leftists, both the Stalinist and Trotskyist varieties, of where Lenin's errors lead.

Alternatively we could have made a more extended critique of Lenin's conception of the revolutionary organisation as a highly centralised body of professional revolutionaries and attempted to bring out how the ICC echoes the early Lenin. Our comment on the ICC and the Bolshevik party was made in passing but perhaps Tampa should have the benefit of the doubt when they trace the ICC's organisational practice back to the Bolsheviks. The following for example is from Lenin in 1902, but it could be the ICC today.

The one serious organisational principle for workers in our movement must be strictest secrecy, strictest choice of members, training of professional revolutionaries. Once these qualities are present something more than democracy is guaranteed: complete comradely confidence among revolutionaries. ...It would be a great mistake to think that the impossibility of a really 'democratic' control makes the members of a revolutionary organisation irresponsible. ...They feel their responsibility very keenly, knowing by experience that in order to rid itself of an unworthy member an organisation of genuine revolutionaries recoils from nothing.

What we tried to do in our texts was something entirely different. We tried to show that any living, proletarian organisation, in spite of what it thinks and says about itself, is by its nature not just a conveyor belt of consciousness to the working class but must be profoundly affected by the movement of the class. When the revolutionary movement is on the upswing then the revolutionary party is revitalised. When the proletariat is in retreat then its organisations withdraw in to themselves.

If we took the Bolshevik party as our example it was because of the myth of the monolithic party, never deviating from the straight line from its correct analyses to the victorious overthrow of the bourgeoisie by the working class. If we took "favourable" quotes from Lenin to show this effect it was because he was the clearest advocate of the view that the party leads the class as well as the originator, in Left-Wing Communism, of the myth of the monolithic party. In fact Lenin was astute enough to learn from the class (and on occasions like the April theses more so than the rest of the central committee of the Bolshevik Party) without ever resolving these partial insights with his

view of the relation between party and class.

Finally our text drew out some relevant lessons for those revolutionary groups today like the ICC and the CWO which we see as closing off their analyses prematurely, closing their minds to what the class will teach us tomorrow.

Tampa's critique

While Tampa in their reply agree with our conclusions they are extremely critical of our initial framework. To them Lenin was not a revolutionary at all but a bourgeois, the Bolsheviks his personal instrument for gaining state power in Russia. They are therefore completely out of sympathy with the method of our text. For them there is nothing to be learned from the history of the Bolshevik party. Their reply is really a reply to yet another text which we didn't write - a defence of the proletarian nature of the Bolsheviks and the October revolution. Thus their argument suffers from not having a clear target to attack and results in a text which gathers together some varied and contradictory evidence for their views.

Tampa lay great emphasis on Lenin's character. Lenin's 'authoritarian' style they attribute to Marx's and Engels' activities in the Communist League and the First International without saying whether they think this makes Marx and Engels bourgeois too. However a close analysis of the history of the First International shows in fact that it was Bakunin who introduced an authoritarian structure to the International and only denounced 'authoritarianism' when he could not put it to his own use. Trotsky and Luxemburg are taken as authorities on Lenin's character but if 'jettisoning' all vestiges of Social Democracy is a prerequisite of revolutionary integrity then we have to point out that at the time neither of these critics had made a clear organisational break from parties of the Second International. For the sake of argument let us accept Tampa's statement that Lenin always got his own way in debates in the Party. Certainly the history of the Bolsheviks gave Lenin immense authority in the Party, which he didn't hesitate to use. But what is Tampa's gripe here? If the Bolshevik Party's members were "in total agreement on the overriding commandment to seize, exercise and hold fast to state power" then no-one was putting forward the interests of the working class. The debates were only debates between representatives of bourgeois views and it doesn't matter to us who won or lost. In fact Tampa don't say that, they obviously think that some members at some times were arguing from proletarian positions. They only catch themselves when it is Lenin who is on the 'right' side and then they put it down to his machiavellianism.

Tampa are on firmer ground when they point out the dangerous implications of Lenin's views on the relationship between the party and class, his substitutionist conception of the revolution and his view that the revolution was at the same time the completion of the bourgeois revolution in Russia and the opening of the proletarian revolution. However we could agree with all this without for a moment giving ground on the revolutionary nature of the Bolsheviks.

Another of Tampa's arguments, which they state more forcefully elsewhere, is their critique of the social origins of the leading members of the Bolshevik Party. But who are the workers, the men and women of humble beginnings which Tampa want to hold up to us as the real revolutionaries?

Pannekoek? Luxemburg? Sylvia Pankhurst? Count Bakunin? Prince Kropotkin? Did social origins make Ebert or Keir Hardie communist militants? For Tampa the degeneration of the Second International can be explained by the presence of middle class elements spouting bourgeois philosophy.

For the CBG none of these arguments are convincing. What makes a group or individual counter-revolutionary is not character defects, social origins or philosophical leanings. These are secondary questions to the concrete facts of their programme and their actions. What made the Second International a bourgeois organisation was its stance in the first world war, helping to drag workers into support for their national bourgeoisie, putting them in uniform to slaughter their fellow workers. Those who stood firmly for the autonomy of the class and for its international nature, who called for replacing imperialist war by civil war, they were the revolutionaries.

Their method and ours

Here lies the root of the problem which disrupts the possibility of regroupment between ourselves and groups like Tampa. By tearing the Bolsheviks and the Second International out of the historical fabric of the revolutionary movement, they abandon the political tradition which we share with groups like the ICC and the CWO (for all their faults). The past of the workers movement and its political organisations is often a tragedy of dead-ends and failures. But the critical examination of the mistakes of past revolutionaries is the only way forward. The strength of Marxism as a systematic study of the historical process lies in its ability to overcome the errors of the past in new analyses. If we can learn something from the Bolshevik Party and the Russian revolution then we should. We can and have cut the umbilical cord to Lenin but we cannot deny our parentage.

What are the alternatives posed by the groups like Tampa? Revolutionary activity can become a question of reinventing everything anew. But revolutionaries are conditioned by history and by the concerns of other revolutionaries. We can no more expect a revolutionary practice to start with a clean sheet than we can expect a child to create its own world.

Some revolutionaries attempt to pick and choose from the past revolutionary movement. With the benefit of hindsight they champion the clearest individual or party from each era and condemn the rest. Thus Tampa accept that Spartakusbund was a proletarian group but the Bolsheviks, who had similar origins and many similar analyses, were not. This can become a sort of sectarianism imposed on the past. We have written elsewhere on the CWO's ahistorical critique of the German and Italian Lefts.

Groups can reject Marxism altogether either for the unaging certainties of Anarchism or for a position which says a plague on all theory. Anarchism has never proved to be the conscious guide to action which Marxism has provided. If Marxism were compared to a clock which sometimes runs slowly then at least it gives some idea of the time of day. Anarchism is like a clock which has stopped. It is useless for all practical purposes but has the immense satisfaction of being right twice a day.

This leaves the position of denying the need for

any theoretical reflection on the revolutionary process. All that is required is the class instincts of the proletariat and their unitary organisations, the workers councils. The history of past revolutionary attempts then becomes the history of the class being hijacked by some political organisation or other for its own ends. But here we come the full circle. By denying theory and our own history we end up with the mirror image of Lenin's view of the Party. Lenin thought that communist consciousness was brought to the class from outside. Our anti-theorists see the party as an alien body in exactly the same way, but bringing counter-revolutionary ideas to

the class.

35.

Class consciousness is not something which develops unconsciously. It involves reflecting, theorising and discussing. It is a process within the class where the political organisations of the class make an invaluable contribution. Our debates within the revolutionary movement today are based on the analyses produced by the historical movement. That has been the method of revolutionaries in the past and it is ours today.

Sinclair

the bulletin

* THE ORGANISATION
OF REVOLUTIONARIES

* THE "ULTRA LEFT REVIEW"

* Correspondence

* Letter from The ICC
and Our Reply

* Letter from The CWO
and Our Reply

* Letter from TAMPA

* ABERDEEN and the ICC

* TAMPA LEAFLET on
THE FALKLANDS WAR

The Bulletin Sept 1982 No. 2

The above Debate originated with a text published in Bulletin Number 2. called "Another Look at the Organisation Question". This issue has been out of print for some time, but in response to the many requests for copies we have got together a reduced size copy of the original in printed form.

A copy may be obtained from us for 50p from our group address:
Box 85. 43 Candlemakers Row
EDINBURGH. U.K.

Only a few such copies have been printed and it is likely that this issue will go out of print once again very soon.

The Italian Ideology

C.B.G. Introduction

The following article, written by a sympathiser of the CBG who used to be a member of the Communist Workers Organisation, is a critique of the recently published Platform of the Partito Comunista Internazionalista. This organisation is also known as Battaglia Comunista (the title of one of its publications) so as to avoid confusion with the numerous other PCI's littering the political scene in Italy.

Battaglia will be best known to English speaking readers through their relationship with the CWO. The CWO has adopted virtually all the positions of Battaglia, though this has been done in great haste and in a manner that has not been very fruitful for the movement at large. - for more details read our articles 'The Long March of the CWO' in Bulletin 1 and 'On the Monolithism of the CWO' in Bulletin 4.

The publication of this Platform is welcome in that it shows in a clear form the theoretical and historical sclerosis of the fraction of the International Communist Left known as the Internationalist Communist Party (Battaglia Comunista). It is hardly an advance on their original Platform of 1952. Let me state right away my recognition of the PCInt as comrades, as militants defending many aspects of the communist programme, aspects which they have now defended for 41 years, since their foundation in Mussolini's prisons in 1945. That said, this Platform clearly reveals what I argued whilst a member of the PCInt's fraternal organisation, the Communist Workers Organisation, that these aspects have been somewhat diluted by the influence of Bordigism (after the founder of the Italian Communist Party, Amadeo Bordiga), that tendency to uncritically ape the errors of Lenin and the degenerating Comintern, all of which have their source in Lenin's failure to understand the lessons of Capitalist decadence, a failure reinforced and tragedised by the degeneration of the Bolshevik Party and Russian state into capitalist bodies in 1921.

While I was in the CWO I was told that my criticisms of the PCInt were contrary to group discipline: thus discipline was used to suppress the debate on the Italian Left. But criticisms of the PCInt's history are central to the arguments against an uncritical approach to the Italian Left. If this uncritical approach were left unchallenged there would be a danger of the CWO becoming opportunist, abandoning the hard-won clarity it and other communists in Britain attained in the 1970's under the positive influence of the French group Revolution Internationale.

This Platform shows that Battaglia Comunista are confused on: Decadence, the Unions, Parliament, the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and Method. In addition, although on the face of it this Platform rejects the possibility of proletarian political groups forming alliances with bourgeois ones, such as the Labour Party and the official Communist Parties, Marxists cannot judge groups and individuals just by what they say about themselves, but also by what they do. The confusion of BC on the United Front can be seen in their attempt to explain their attempted United Front with the Socialist and Communist Parties in Italy in 1945.

The foreword to Battaglia's Platform claims that:

"The new questions posed to revolutionaries by the events following the October Revolution had already been resolved organically by our Party both on the theoretical and practical level."

The following article demonstrates that this is far from being the case. Several crucial issues remain unresolved, and we must work towards their resolution by a full and public debate within the communist movement - not by organisational manoeuvres or tactical silences. (In this spirit we would be happy to offer the CWO, or indeed Battaglia, space in the Bulletin to reply to EM's text).

Copies of Battaglia's Platform can be obtained from P.O. Box 145, Head Post Office. GLASGOW. U.K.

Unless the CWO can criticise, fiercely but fraternally as this article does, the Platform of the PCInt it too will become sclerotic, it too will simply become an uncritical appendage of an opportunist regroupment. It will be in danger of repeating in the coming period the extremely serious errors of the PCInt during the last World War. I must make clear, however that the degeneration of the CWO into Bordigism on the party question and class consciousness is not the fault of the PCInt, since the PCInt's position on this issue is more dialectical than that of the CWO (more on this later) It is more the result of the sectarian practice of the CWO itself which has remained constant throughout its bizarre odyssey from the Scylla of councilism to the Charybdis of Bordigism.

METHOD: PHILOSOPHICAL IDEALISM IN 'PLACE' OF DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM.

Those who argue that the Italian Left's method was consistently the Marxist one, that it was from the Italian Left tradition that the Marxist method was kept alive, have a lot of explaining to do. But when asked to explain this method the leadership of the CWO came out with a series of excuses and evasions which were simply an insult to the intelligence, even of their supporters. In particular the texts by JD and DGPlace in Revolutionary Perspectives 20 are simply a refusal to answer the question:

"Calling for an explanation or demonstration of the new method is 'un-methodical'"
(RP 20 page 15)

Thought DGP denies it Marx demonstrated and explained the materialist method quite explicitly in, (to take just three examples) The German Ideology, Preface to a Critique of Political Economy and the Grundrisse.

"The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and their material conditions, both those already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can be verified in a purely empirical way."
(Marx. The German Ideology.)

The PCInt Platform shows a certain lack of understanding of this method, and the theory of the decadence of Capitalism which the CWO developed from it while they were still in the 'German Left Tradition', a theory which I maintain, underlies Marxist politics today.⁽¹⁾

In a typically throwaway phrase the PCInt open their Platform:

"The essential characteristic of capitalism is the contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production."
(my emphasis)

They don't even distinguish between different phases of capital's development. This clearly goes against Marx's understanding of the nature of decadence (well before capitalism had entered its decadent phase) when he says that the relations of production change from "forms" fostering the development of the forces of production in a given mode of production's "progressive" or "ascendant" phase, to "fetters" on such development in that mode of production's "decadent" phase. (see the Preface) This, applied to Twentieth Century Capitalism is a clear demonstration of the marxist method, not the CWO's pathetic, fawning excuses for the PCInt and its predecessors.

LENIN KNEW MY FATHER

The consequences of the PCInt's faulty understanding of decadence, a consequence of its inability to thoroughly arm itself with the dialectical method of proletarian materialism, in its turn flowing from their inability to thoroughly criticise Lenin,⁽²⁾ are clear! they say it is still possible to stand for office in the Unions and Parliament, and the PCInt's clarity on the United Front is still somewhat fuzzy. The one major exception to the PCInt's Leninism is its rejection of support for national liberation struggles, as it has done since its formation. The Platform clearly supports Luxemburg's position that there is no basis for revolutionaries to support such movements today. Nevertheless, the continued characterisation of the Kurdish nationalist organisation Komala as proletarian in spite of its United Front with the Kurdish ruling class (WV 14.p5) gives the lie to the CWO's assertion that:

"The lessons of the united front have since and not accidentally by the legatees of the Italian Left, become incorporated into the proletariat's programme." (RP.20.pl6)

More on this later.

THE TRADE UNION QUESTION.

"Even the newly-founded PCInt did not at first have a clear vision." (RP 20.p24)

In this Platform the PCInt defend their longstanding view that it is possible for revolutionaries to work in trade union organisations today. In spite of correctly affirming "nor do we advocate that workers recuperate the existing unions". They say

"In this sense the Party's activity will be carried out from inside or outside the union organisations, depending on the material conditions communists find themselves working in..." (p 8. my emphasis)

They don't merely say that it is possible for revolutionaries to hold union cards to go to union meetings in order to struggle against the unions' sabotage of the class struggle. They explicitly talk about working in the organisations of unions.

Are BC aware of the criticisms of this position? In the first place it gives militant workers the idea that there is some life in the unions, and if actually elected to office, it would mean playing a role in the management of capital, and in capital's policing of the working class. It means "negotiating" defeat for the class. Revolutionaries say there is nothing to negotiate, and therefore no role for the unions in the class, and certainly no role for revolutionaries in the unions organisations.

The nearest the PCInt get to a "decadence" interpretation of the reactionary role of unions in their Platform is (p 7):

"In the present stage of totalitarian domination of imperialism, the unions are an absolutely necessary part of this domination since their aims correspond to the counterrevolutionary requirements of the bourgeoisie."

and:

"From the moment that the unions adapted their policies to the game of imperialist competition they ceased to express the specific interests of the workers."

But unions did not "adapt" their aims and policies to the bourgeoisie. Rather it was the fact that their "policies" were still based on the Reformist period, and that capitalism had changed, which made them counterrevolutionary; their "policies" were simply an aspect of their function as permanent negotiating bodies. BC's understanding of the role of unions is, like all of their confusions, a result of their inability to subject the comintern to a thorough critique. BC say:

"The International's instruction to work inside those mass organisations, which, like the unions where they are present, can influence the majority of the class was extremely correct"
(The Italian Left, The German Left and the Comintern, serialised in Battaglia Comunista summer 1982.)
They add:

"The conquest (which was possible at the time) of the workers unions...."

and:

"...conquering the unions' organs or..and this should be pointed out - the workers within these organs for communism." (my emphasis)

But conquering the unions is not the same as conquering the workers inside the unions for communism. The unions were objectively counter-revolutionary at that time, since capitalism was decadent, and those organs built up during ascendancy had become organs of capital's domination over the class. This became objectively true during the First World War at the latest. Revolutionaries who tried to conquer the unions were objectively helping the ruling class, whatever they may have thought they were doing. They simply gave the false impression that the unions could be turned back into workers organisations by a change of leadership, an idealist position: history proved them wrong. Today, supporting Lenin's views on the unions is not just wrong, it is counterrevolutionary.

However, in total contradiction to everything else they say on the union question the PCInt have published a remarkably clear statement of the reasons for non-participation in unions by revolutionaries, hidden in a set of "Theses", published in English in WV 16. Thesis five says that the unions are dependent on the suppression of the proletariat because their role, negotiation, is subordinated to capital in its decadent epoch. Now the CWO introduce these theses with the familiar

charge that critics of the PCInt's positions are guilty of "falsifications" and "systematic misrepresentations". But as can be seen from an overview of the PCInt's work on the subject, this is somewhat paranoid. The PCInt has confused other communists by producing contradictory positions, and it is difficult to know what the real position is.

We must see Lenin critically, in context, as part of the ebb and flow of the working class movement. we do not worship him, nor do we denigrate him indiscriminately, as do the councilists. "The Italian Left, the German Left and the Comintern", which was BC's main contribution to the debate on the Italian Left in the CWO, uncritically endorses Lenin's "Left Wing Communism", the rejection of which is the cornerstone of communist politics. This appallingly misinformed and reactionary stream of lies and abuse, beloved of leftists of all shades, was instrumental in driving out much of the communist opposition to the Comintern's degeneration into opportunism. It resulted in the expulsion of the KAPD in Germany and Sylvia Pankhurst in Britain. BC's endorsement of this pamphlet starkly illuminates the price the Italian Left had to pay for remaining inside the Comintern long after it became an arm of renescent Russian capitalism. (3)

BC say:

"Today the unions are what they are because of the fact that they were born, and still exist on the basis of the objective necessity for the working class - within the capitalist framework - to negotiate the sale of labour power (price and conditions). That said we haven't discovered anything. Engels said it in 1871-2 in the 'Labour Standard'..."

(BC letter to the CWO. 7.12.82.)

What this omits is the difference between "negotiating" then and "negotiating" now. Then, when capitalism was still able to concede meaningful and permanent reforms, it was possible, and even correct, to negotiate for these reforms, as well as to struggle. Unions were actual organs of working class struggle in spite of continual tendencies for their officials to become corrupted etc... But today, to say the unions "still exist... to negotiate the sale of labour power", is to miss the whole point about the change in period. The comrades of the PCInt don't realise that today the unions exist to "negotiate" for capitalism, and, since capitalism only has attacks on the working class to offer, they negotiate reductions in living standards, no-strike agreements during wars etc.. Capitalists have often been clearer on this than certain "Marxists" - for example in South Africa, Fords and other companies have set up Black unions. That even these unions which are independent of the state can only hold back and defeat the class can be seen from the example of Solidarnosc in Poland, which led the mass strike onto the terrain of negotiations, capitalist promises which capitalism in crisis can't afford to keep and therefore inevitably total defeat.

The examples are endless and the theoretical background has been developed in International Review, RP, WV, and the Communist Bulletin. Revolutionaries have a duty to try to convince the PCInt of their errors on this question, and to draw out their occasional sparks of clarity.

PARLIAMENTARIANISM.

"The traitors to the proletariat and the 'practical' socialists of our day, have left all criticisms of parliamentarianism to the anarchists, and on this wonderfully

reasonable ground, they denounce all criticism of parliament as "anarchism!!". (Lenin. State and Revolution.)

Why the PCInt regards the opportunity for participation in parliament (not just in elections, a slightly different question (5)) as "increasingly rarer" (p 7) is not made clear. What is made clear is that they still think it is possible to "use parliament as a revolutionary tribunal". This again is a result not only of their failure to understand decadence, but also their unqualified rejection of the German and Dutch Left's position on this question as "anarchist". But the German Left, unlike the anarchists did not reject the use of parliament on moral grounds.

"Opposition to electoral democracy is in no way an abstract principle, but a practical necessity rooted in the period. To urge the proletariat to take part in elections in the period of capitalist decadence amounts to nourishing in it the illusion that the crisis can be overcome by parliamentary means". (The German Left: Strengths and Limits. in Rev. Int. number 6. The quote is from Jan Appel.)

After the capitulation of Social Democracy and the unions in 1914 the German Left began to see that Parliamentarianism was no longer of any use to revolutionaries, that abstentionism was a principle for communists. BC parrots Lenin's denunciation of this position in "The Italian Left, The German Left and the Comintern" and even asserts that Bordiga and the Abstentionist Fraction of the Italian Left, who based their arguments in the last revolutionary wave on the contributions, not of Lenin, but of the Dutch communist Pannakoeck, the major foreign contributor to Bordiga's paper "Il Soviet", regarded it as 'tactical'. BC defends "revolutionary parliamentarianism", using parliament where and when 'tactically' expedient, as a revolutionary tribunal to denounce social democracy itself. This position is taken straight from 19th Century social democracy and is the leftist position today.

RUSSIA

The PCInt takes a step back on the Russian question compared with some elements of the Italian Left fraction in the 1930s, clearly stating that it was World War Two which saw the Russian Workers State become bourgeois. (p.3). In spite of the attempts of some comrades to draw a veil over the whole period, we must clearly establish that the Russia of the Show Trials, of forced collectivisation, was a BOURGEOIS state, NOT a workers one. I defend the old CWO position that Russia became a bourgeois state in 1921 - it is possible to do this within the pages of the Bulletin, but not in RP. Nevertheless the PCInt are clear on the need for permanent Soviet democracy in any future workers' state. (p.4)

SUBSTITUTIONISM AND THE PARTY.

The PCInt is clearer than the CWO on substitutionism, the tendency for the working class in capitalist society to believe that a minority can carry out the tasks which only the workers themselves can carry out in the revolutionary process.

"At no time and for no reason does the proletariat abandon its combative role. It does not delegate to others its historic mission and it does not give away its power 'by proxy' (p.6).

Correct.

The CWO say that this position, also defended by the

ICC, is a liberal red herring, that in the revolution, any distinction between the party and the class is formalistic, and that 'the party takes power through the councils'. But their position today that the party leads the unconscious masses out of the muck of ages, which is only a hair's breadth from the view that the party has the right to rule in the name of the class, is considerably more Bordigist, more reactionary, than the PCInt's though it should be said that not all members of the CWO defend their official position. In contrast the PCInt are clear that the party must not merge with the workers' state - party and state must remain formally separate. (p.4)

"At the same time there is no class struggle which is not also a political struggle. The instrument of such a struggle is the revolutionary party of the class, which, from contingent struggles, leads the class forward to the revolutionary insurrection to destroy the capitalist state, in order to build the state of the proletarian dictatorship." (p.5)

The above is a series of abstractions, divorced from history. It only half-describes what actually happened in the great proletarian revolutions of 1871 (France), 1905, 1917 (Russia) and 1918 (Germany). Did the Bolshevik Party lead the class to build Soviets in 1905? No. It initially opposed them. Did the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party lead the Soviets from defence of the Republic to revolutionary defeatism in March 1917? No, it supported defensism, the continuation of the world war, at that time. In July 1917 it actually held back the Petrograd Soviet, and told workers to release arrested bourgeois ministers. We do not say this to "denigrate Lenin", but in order to enlighten the reader as to the fact that Marxism starts from the concrete, not the ideal. It starts from the lessons of how the proletariat in reality, makes revolutions, not how professors of philosophy deduce they "ought" to be made.

Leading the class to the insurrection is not the simple one-sided process this Platform implies. The Party also learns from the class. The educator must himself be educated.

FACTORY GROUPS.

It is interesting to note that the PCInt's definition of factory groups is very similar to the KAPD's factory organisations. I would wholeheartedly endorse the creation of such groups, on a clear anti-union basis, though the CBG currently tends not to agree with this position. The Wildcat group, in contrast, have a more correct attitude to this question. Perhaps they are part of the Italian Left tradition.

"These groups are not duplicates of the Party since they also regroup sympathisers and other elements outside the Party who hold our position on the 'union problem'. (p.8)

These groups also aim to link the Party to the rise of new mass organisations (p.9), just as the KAPD's factory organisations did when they tried to link the party to the rise of the worker's councils.

DEFEATISM, DEFENCISM, AND THE UNITED FRONT

One of the most serious dangers arising from the PCInt's failure to appropriate the theory of decadence is their misunderstandings on the United Front.

The PCInt claims it is clear on the United

Front, and that its attempt to engage in joint work with the CP and the SP in 1945 was "the last attempt by the Italian Left to implement the tactic of the 'United Front from below....". They add "the clarity of our comrades enabled them to wipe it out of the organisation once and for all..." (RP 20, p37). But the clarity of their comrades has not even enabled them to see that their "Address" to the CP and the SP was not an attempted United Front "from below", but from above. It was aimed at the leaders of these parties, not merely at the members of them, as a United Front from below is. It was aimed at the 'agitation committees of parties of a proletarian direction' (sic) (International Review 32 pl7). The PCInt laments "... it is stupefying to find that the CP of Italy verbally expressed its refusal to answer us ... the Socialist Party replied ... Our response to this letter (the SP's reply) was ..." (IR 32 pl8).

In 1945, the PCInt tried to form a political United Front with the Stalinist and Socialist butchers of the working class. Worse still, is the actual position on the war which the PCInt took in 1945. While the comrades of Internationalisme were risking their lives flyposting Paris with revolutionary defeatist posters, against both sides in the war, (contrary to the claims of the CWO and the PCInt), BC was producing the following gem:

"..(we also agree) that the fascist regime is finished socially and politically, even if German weapons still bring it some oxygen, and even if we must wage a hard and bloody struggle to extirpate it from Italian soil..."

(Prometeo. No. 1, April 1945. quoted in IR32pl7)

A fundamental principle of revolutionaries in imperialist wars is to call on workers to fight their own government, to struggle to sabotage their country's war effort. In the face of occupation by a foreign power, revolutionaries resist calls to join a popular resistance and urge workers to turn their guns against their officers, even inside the resistance. They call on both the workers in uniform of the invading army and workers of the invaded country to fight against their respective ruling classes. While not exactly defencist, the above quotes from the PCInt, 1945 are certainly centrist (vascillating between defencism and defeatism) and should be subject to an unstinting critique. Revolutionary defeatism will be the communist position in any future war. Will it be the PCInt's? We hope so.

"..the objective possibilities for an international regroupment must be found among those groups which have openly and definitely broken with Stalinism, with democracy, with war and with the more recent forms of opportunism."

(p.9)

We would enthusiastically endorse this assertion of the PCInt's. For a future Zimmerwald to raise the Promethean torch of revolutionary internationalism in the face of the war preparations of the bourgeoisie demands the most searching self-criticism by revolutionary groups and the facilitation of their international and internal debate and confrontation. The CBG will carry out joint work with any and all revolutionary defeatist forces, against all capitalist wars today and tomorrow. That is the only 'United Front' communists can endorse, and the class war the only war.

E. Mav

The notes to this article may be found on page

A Critique

The following text was written last August after an extended visit to Europe. It was sent to the ICC for publication in the International Review nine months ago and since then I have not received one single word in answer. (1) (2) In World Revolution no 69 the ICC claims to possess the "desire for open confrontation of positions between all tendencies within the workers' movement", and "will continue to defend the necessity for revolutionaries to develop their positions in the heat of fraternal but uncompromising polemic". Unfortunately, anyone familiar with the theoretical practice of the ICC will not fail to point out its special kind of sectarianism - and its claims to be against sectarianism! Whenever it encounters a criticism it cannot answer, it simply remains silent but continues to propound the criticised position as if it was an accepted truth. (This is, of course, not to say that when it does answer criticisms its arguments are valid.)

Examples are abundant. To give just one for the purpose of illustration. In debating Luxemburg's crisis theory, the CWO (also rapidly degenerating now) used Russia's accumulation during the 1930's, which took place with virtually no external trade, as an argument. The ICC answered that Russian capital accumulated on the basis of the pre-capitalist part of Russia's internal economy. When the CWO pointed out that that was to say Russian capital was not decadent until the 1940's, the ICC remained silent. I have been told personally by some ICC comrades that they find that blatantly sectarian but, unfortunately, they have not brought it up within the ICC. (3)

I did not write the following text to be buried in the ICC's archives. I still look forward to its publication in its entirety by the ICC, though I am not hopeful. (5)

LLM May 1984

Footnotes

(1) An earlier text by myself criticising the empiricist method employed by many critics of the Left in Opposition view, though explicitly stating that it was not a defence of that view, was published by the ICC in International Review no 34.

(2) In a letter dated 16 May 1984, the ICC, obviously unhappy that I consider the Communist Bulletin Group a vigorous communist group and that I published a text criticising the ICC's monolithic tendencies in Bulletin no 5, rudely makes the blank assertion, "As for your personal theories on the Left in Opposition, it seems to us that your 'clarification' of your original text simply rescinds all of the positive points in the earlier text. We still aim to publish some extracts to show what your current position is, but it merely contains the conventional, empiricist arguments against our own analysis".

(3) Even worse is the ICC's insistence that the CBG is a "non-proletarian group". I quote an extract from my reply to its letter of the 16 May to illustrate the extent of its degeneration.

I refer to your letter of 16.5.84 and would like to reply as follows.

1. You accuse me of not understanding "what is meant by the principle of defence of the organisation (by violence if necessary)". I presume you make this allegation on the basis that I published the text Is the ICC tending towards monolithism? in the Bulletin no 5, ie, that I am "accomodating with" (to use your derogatory term) what you consider to be a non-proletarian group, because it threatened to call the police on you ("this principle [of defence of the organisation] stands by itself, and adequately shows why the CBG has put itself outside the revolutionary milieu"). May I ask:- Did I or did I not in the forward to my text say "the forerunners of the Bulletin group ... were

wrong in the following: 1. to threaten to call the police ..." (page 18)?

May be you think that is not enough, because the very act of publishing my text in the Bulletin shows I do not understand what I am saying; i.e. the question is your accusation that the CBG is a non-proletarian group. May I ask:

- a) Have the CBG admitted or have they not that they were wrong to have threatened to call the police?
- b) If they have, what class line have they crossed which they have not corrected?
- c) If their correction of their mistake was not enough to 'grace' them in your 'theory' of what a proletarian group is, what basis do you have to consider for example, the PCInt as proletarian since they participated in the partisan movement in Italy towards the end of world war two, in defence in general during that period, in united frontism from above (of International Review no 32), in trade-unionism, parliamentarianism, and still have not admitted their past mistakes.

(4) Readers interested in an overall critique of the rapidly degenerating ICC - its monolithism, sectarianism and the idealist, anti-Marxist methodology underlying many of its theories - will be interested in a number of texts I will be publishing in one volume in about two month's time, which I'll seek to be distributed internationally. Also, allow me to take this opportunity to re-emphasise that, despite our very important common starting point of struggling against the degeneration of the 'old' groups in the left communist milieu, I have important differences with the CBG which require to be ironed out through criticism and self-criticism, a capacity the 'old' groups have ceased to possess.

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The publication in International Review no 34 of my text on the Left in Opposition view requires the present follow-up for three reasons: 1) The text's main theme was what I saw as the methodological mistake of the perspective's criticisms, it did not deal with the errors of the ICC's own methodology (of which I was not totally aware then), nor with my view of the soundness or unsoundness of the perspective itself, ie, its theoretical validity or falsity; 2) Having spoken to numerous ICC comrades earlier this summer, it's now my conclusion that many of them are indeed guilty of the methodological error their critics allege them to have committed. (As will be seen, though the critics have been able to point this out, because of their own methodological error, they have not been able to locate it within an overall critique.) 3) Some comrades in the milieu have mistaken my text as supportive of the perspective. Consequently I feel some clarification is necessary. As the Left in Opposition perspective, the conception of the consciousness of the bourgeoisie and the Historic Course analysis are inextricably tied and stand and fall together, it is necessary to discuss them all in the present text.

For the sake of clarity, let me briefly go over the theme of my previous text. At the risk of oversimplification, I summarized the criticisms of the perspective which I was aware of as follows: "You (the ICC) say that capital now needs its left in opposition, but this suggests a conspiratorial view of history according to which the bourgeoisie, responding to capital's needs, consciously pushes its left into opposition. This is a non-Marxist methodology. Also, show us the evidence of this conspiracy." On this I said: The Marxist methodology starts from the "dynamic of the ... underlying relations" of capital (in this case its needs at the present conjuncture). If this suggests that the bourgeoisie consciously pushes its left into opposition, so be it, and we should not, "as does the empiricist", bother about "whether evidence exists to catch the bourgeoisie red-handed in conspiracy".

As I now see it, the point about empiricism is still correct, but I was unaware that a methodological issue is indeed involved in the major bone of contention: the link between the analysis of capital's underlying relations and the bourgeoisie's actions (hence the question of evidence), viz., the question of the bourgeoisie's consciousness of its own needs. There can, of course, be no doubt that the bourgeoisie is conscious of its own needs, but the question is, and I cannot overemphasise the importance of this: is this consciousness still bound by its own ideology, or does it attain the level of a Marxist, materialistic understanding of history? For example, the bourgeoisie goes to war in response to capital's crisis because it sees the need to, but does it know its aim is to devalue capital? As I will try to show, the ICC (1) takes this consciousness on the latter level, which gives rise directly to its conspiratorial/machiavellian view of history/ the bourgeoisie. It is this mistaken linking up of analysing capital's underlying relations and the bourgeoisie's actions that was seized upon by the critics, apparently without either side being precisely aware of the exact location of the issue. For example, commenting on my schematic 'division' of the bourgeoisie into class 1 and

class 2, which was precisely an attempt to draw the ICC's attention to the danger it faces in ignoring the basically ideological nature of the bourgeoisie's world view by suggesting a machiavellian view of the bourgeoisie, the ICC mistakenly suggests that I was putting a new 'class' between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, not in so many words, but effectively so, because in laying sole emphasis on capital's needs (in a mistaken way though), it does so at the price of altogether ignoring the above mentioned link. The reverse applies to its critics, in laying sole emphasis on the bourgeoisie's 'consciousness' question and demanding evidence, they fail to realise that in this context, the former can only be meaningfully posed by viewing it as the link between capital's underlying needs and the bourgeoisie's actions.

As I said, the ICC sees the bourgeoisie as conscious of its own needs on the level of attaining a Marxist materialistic understanding of history. For example, it asserts that the pacifist 'campaigns' are created (2) by the bourgeoisie consciously in a machiavellian, conspiratorial way to derail the working class struggle. When I asked some comrades how is the bourgeoisie supposed to be able to know that pacifism (or, for that matter, the anti-nuclear movements, sundry anarchist 'populisms', etc) in which sundry leftists, who all profess their goal as the overthrow of capitalism, are active, is not going to endanger the capitalist system? As Marxists, we know that the proletariat is the only revolutionary class, but how is the bourgeoisie supposed to be able to know this as well, and, congratulating themselves on this knowledge, go about creating movements which it knows will not endanger its system, but will only serve to derail the real revolutionary struggle?

Various answers were given, such as: It knows because it controls these movements which are, after all, its own creation. Who is this 'it'? The bourgeoisie as a whole? In that case, the whole bourgeoisie are Marxists! But the question remains: how is the bourgeoisie able to become Marxists? Or only the 'big' bourgeoisie of the 'big' parties such as the Democrats in the US? In that case how is the 'big' bourgeoisie supposed to be able to know that the 'small' bourgeoisie, notably the leftists who, as said, all profess to aim to overthrow capitalism and are conspicuously active in these 'campaigns', is not going to be able to rally increasing support and one day become strong enough to overthrow it? (Reply: it, ie, the 'big' bourgeoisie, knows because these movements, including the part in which the leftists are active, are so infiltrated by its agents (FBI etc) that it knows it only has to 'lock those fuckers up' to 'innoculate' them.) But, isn't it precisely because the 'big' bourgeoisie has contradictions (though not class contradictions as Marxists know) with the 'small' bourgeoisie that it infiltrates the latter with agents? And still the original question remains unanswered.

It knows through experience. I don't deny the capacity of the bourgeoisie to learn through experience, but becoming Marxists through experience?!

Thus, according to the ICC, the conflict in El Salvador is created by the US bourgeoisie, not to create a left in clandestinity (the ICC's latest

creation), but to create the pacifist 'campaigns' in the heartlands of Western Europe and the US. I don't intend to wander off my main theme by going into the detailed arguments here; we only have to recall how, basing its argument on the same conspiratorial/ machiavellian view of the bourgeoisie, the ICC asserted in 1979 that Nicaragua was handed over to the Sandinistas by ... the US! (3)

In a letter to the ICC in 1982 (see my text in International Review no 34) I warned it against unawares assuming that the bourgeoisie was able to overcome its own inner contradictions in their Left in Opposition perspective. Nicaragua and El Salvador have just been mentioned. In a recent ICC meeting which I attended, a comrade argued that protectionism is also primarily a nationalist 'campaign' against the workers. (4) So, not only is the conspiratorial/ machiavellian view of the bourgeoisie, which turns it into Marxists, not questioned or at least reconsidered by going through its assumptions and logic in the face of such mounting criticism from the rest of the milieu, it has now become the sole starting point of each and every analysis. (The left in clandestinity is an expression of this.)

The ICC's mistake does not only lie in the above methodological error, it is also theoretical. The logic of its various perspectives in question is as follows:

1. The course of history is either war or revolution. The crisis is already more than deep enough to have led to war, if not for the obstacle of the proletariat.
2. To overcome this obstacle and therefore to be able to go to war, the bourgeoisie, given its Marxist consciousness, needs to derail the working class by pushing the left into opposition and to mount ideological 'campaigns' against it.
3. If the left of the bourgeoisie loses its 'credibility', and if the ideological 'campaigns' fail, the working class will rise in revolutionary struggles. The ICC does not say this in so many words but this is the logic of their position: since the course of history is towards revolution (5) and the left in opposition's role is to derail the working class, therefore, if it loses its 'credibility', and the ideological 'campaigns' fail as well, it directly and naturally follows that the working class will rise in revolutionary struggles.

Let's examine this logic in the above itemized order. It will be noted that point 1. is the key link because it is the starting point, the foundation stone on which the whole logic rests. With it, and with the point on methodology just discussed, the ICC's perspectives in question, stand or fall.

1. The course of history is either war or revolution ...

This involves a couple of aspects:

- a) The nature of the crisis: without going into the details of Luxemburgist crisis theory, let me just state that, despite assertions to the contrary, and notwithstanding efforts taken to 'account' for facts contradicting its economics, the ICC's view of the crisis is one of a sudden crash, at least as far as it applies here. Thus, in International Review no 15, the text "The Course of History" states: "Between the crisis of 1929 and the second world war, capitalism took ten years..." to go to war. Even a cursory review of the economic history of the 1930's shows us that the crisis did not begin and end in 1929 and

therefore war was not on the immediate agenda in 1929 but was a slow process with ups and downs through the decade. To illustrate the ICC's inability to understand the nature of capital's economic crisis we have only to recall that in 1975 it 'predicted' the impossibility of any upturn, and just a few months ago it branded signs of recovery in the US as only so much propaganda of the bourgeoisie's conspiracy to 'guarantee' Kohl's election. (See World Revolution no 59.) (6) I don't want to sidetrack myself by economics. The point here is that, instead of carefully examining the nature of crisis in general and today's in particular, the ICC simply takes it for granted that the crisis is already deeper than requiring war. (7)

- b) More important than the above, however, is the ICC's view of the connection between crisis and war. After noting that "imperialist antagonisms ... depend on the deepening [?] of the crisis and don't originate in the action of the proletariat", the text in International Review no 15 (page 3) nevertheless went on to assert that it took ten years between 1929 and 1939 for the bourgeoisie to fight a war that was already required and therefore on the immediate agenda in 1929. According to this view then history can, so to speak, be suspended in mid-air: the underlying dynamic of capital requires war, but the meeting of this need can be suspended for ten years by the necessity to "ideologically defeat" the working class and the necessity for the bourgeoisie to prepare for war militarily. Where, in this scenario, is the dynamic of capital's underlying dynamic to be found? The bourgeoisie thus does not prepare for war as the crisis unfolds, but sees the need for war in a sudden crash, and then prepares for war!

What about the role of an undefeated proletariat in suspending history? According to the International Review no 18 text, the historic course is either war or revolution because "the two principle antagonistic classes in society can [not] go on preparing (8) their respective responses to the crisis ... completely independently of each other". (page 17) This is certainly true. But how does it 'prove' that the historic course is only either towards war or revolution? The text has this to say: "The only moment when the bourgeoisie can attain unity at a world level, when it can silence its imperialist rivalries, is when its very survival is threatened by its mortal enemy, the proletariat." (page 17) To 'prove' the point the text cites 1871 (the collaboration between Prussia and the Versailles government) and 1918 (freeing of German soldiers by the Entente to crush the Spartacists). These two solitary examples are supposed to have 'proved' the path to war and revolution are exclusive of each other. One only has to note that by time these two inter-imperialist (whether the Franco-Prussian war was imperialist does not concern us here) collaborations were concluded, their respective wars had already been won by one side. That is the war had already served its purpose, hence my emphasis on 'to' just now.

If we have shown the extreme shakiness of the 'proofs' on which the ICC bases its entire view, we still need to address the capability of an undefeated proletariat to suspend history, though the fact that the ICC has neither addressed this question itself or has only been able to resort to the above 'shaky' proofs could have relieved us of this onus. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that war was already necessary in 1975 (today's equivalent of 1929), but because of an undefeated

proletariat the bourgeoisie has been unable to fight the war it desperately needs. Yet, at the same time, the proletariat has not been revolutionary enough to make the insurrection. What happens then? According to the ICC's view, if this state persists, history will be suspended indefinitely! So, instead of war or revolution, we in fact have a third historic course open, an indefinite stalemate between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, each 'preparing' its response to the crisis.

It is possible for the ICC to argue that a long drawn out stalemate will end in a defeat of the working class and the course to war will then be open. But then how are we supposed to understand the process of capital accumulation during the stalemate? For we originally started with the crisis as a sudden crash opening up the way to war or revolution (either exclusively of each other or not doesn't matter here). Then we have a stalemate of say 15 years. Finally the proletariat is beaten and war breaks out answering to the need of 15 years earlier. In other words capital accumulation originally broke down 15 years ago (this is the definition of crisis in accordance with the ICC's view that war can come later than the requirements of the breakdown of capital accumulation). Now the solution to that breakdown finally has the chance to play itself out so that accumulation can be renewed. But how did capital somehow get over those intervening years during which it had supposedly broken down and had not had any lease of life for its renewal? To answer this question one must return to the accumulation process during those 15 years, and the only way to do so is to analyse the crisis as a process and not as a sudden crash.

History can only be understood in terms of the existing mode of production's underlying dynamic. This means that it can in no way be suspended. If capital's underlying dynamic (its accumulation) requires war, war will break out (the preparations for war are only manifestations of the maturing of this underlying need), whatever the state of the class struggle. If the proletariat sees the need for revolution, there will be revolution even at the height of the war. And when revolution does break out during a war, then by definition that war will be disrupted, not because the courses to war or revolution exclude one another, but simply because a bourgeoisie cannot have a proletariat which has expropriated factories for revolutionary purposes to be producing for the war at the same time. (Whether in such a case an inter-imperialist collaboration results to crush the revolution; whether, if that happened, the war has accomplished its tasks, and what would happen if it has not, are different matters.)

For an example we need only look at the Russian experience on the outbreak of and during the first world war. Mobilization took place in the midst of workers singing revolutionary songs and chanting "Down with the War!"; inscriptions such as "Comrades, we won't be any better off if Russia wins, they'll squash us even harder", appeared everywhere. But the Russian bourgeoisie was still able to wage the war and continue it despite, to mention only a few outstanding examples, the famous struggles of the Baltic Fleet workers in uniforms, the Petersburg January 1916 demonstration, the Donets Basin strike and the Gorlovka miners' unrest in the same year (which resulted in their massacre - that's how the bourgeoisie actually responds to the workers' resistance to its war preparation and conduct, not engineering ideological 'campaigns').

To conclude this part, in its view of the historic course being towards only either war or revolution, its view that war does not necessarily break out even when needed by the crisis, its view that we are in such a stage today and its view that an undefeated proletariat is capable of suspending history, not only has the ICC not examined the validity of these views, which are basically only assumptions taken for granted, except on the odd occasion when two solitary, shaky examples were quoted, I have shown them to be based on an unmaterialistic view of history.

2. To overcome the obstacle of the proletariat ...

The text in International Review no 18 puts this most coherently:

- * in order for an imperialist war to break out, capitalism needs first to inflict a profound defeat on the proletariat - above all an ideological defeat, but also a physical one if the proletariat has shown strong combativity (...)
- * this defeat must not just leave the class passive but must get the workers to adhere enthusiastically to bourgeois ideals (...) (page 19)

The text then goes on to say that these 'ideals' must be defended by organisations having the confidence of the workers, and since, among other reasons, neither the Social-Democrats nor the Communists can command such confidence any longer today ("Their anti-proletarian function is clear and has been recognised by many workers", page 20), the historic course is towards revolution. Interesting, isn't it, that an argument which would have argued against the Left in Opposition perspective is used to argue in favour of its other side, the course is towards revolution view.

Let's look at a 'proof' cited by the text in supporting its thesis:

Thus at the beginning of the twentieth century there were many threats of imperialist war, many opportunities for unleashing a generalized war (the Russo-Japanese war, the Franco-German conflicts over Morocco, the Balkan conflicts, invasion of the Tripolitaine by Italy). The fact that these conflicts didn't generalize was to no small extent linked to the fact that, up until 1912, the working class (through mass demonstrations) and the International (special motions at the Congresses of 1907 and 1910, Extraordinary Congress on the question of war in 1912) mobilized themselves each time there was a local conflict. And it wasn't until the working class, anaesthetized by the speeches of the opportunists, stopped mobilizing itself against the threat of war (between 1912 and 1914) that capitalism was able to unleash an imperialist war, starting with an incident (the Sarajevo assassination) which seemed much less serious than the previous ones. (page 21) (9)

Had the Second International suddenly become opportunistic only in 1912? And if it had in fact, how was it that a militant, internationalist proletariat could just as suddenly be "anaesthetized by the speeches of the opportunists", since we all know the party does not make the class? The plain truth is there was never any 1912 turning point after which the bourgeoisie, through the suddenly degenerating second international, unleashed an ideological

'campaign' against a hitherto fighting working class, which was subsequently defeated ideologically, thereby opening up the way to war, a path not open prior to 1912, though war had been a necessity as early as 1904. The Russian example has just been given. For another, the SPD had always "supported German foreign policy on all decisive questions" (10) and its 'Marxist Centre' had always sown illusions about the non-inevitability of war. While at the Bureau of the Workers International meeting in Brussels from July 29th to the 30th, 1914 (in response to the imminent outbreak of world war one) even Guesde was able to ask V. Adler: "And the workers' front?" Further, following the Bureau's meeting, a great rally of workers (in the thousands) assembled in and around the Cirque Royal chanting, "They won't dare to do it; and even if they should we have the International!", as Jaures and others struck up internationalist exhortations. (11) I do not pretend that these examples actually prove my case, but, at the very least, they prove the hollowness of the ICC's.

Let's return to basics. Is it necessary, for war to be waged, to have the proletariat profoundly defeated ideologically to the degree that it adheres "enthusiastically to bourgeois ideals"? (12)

We all agree that the ruling ideology is the ideology of the ruling class. This means that so long as the proletariat fails to see the need for revolution it remains under the ruling ideology. Thus war can be mobilized (13) so long as the proletariat fails to see the need for revolution and putting that into practice, for in such a case the proletariat is, by definition, already ideologically defeated. The Russian experience quoted above gives a good illustration. War was waged despite the presence of significant, enthusiastically internationalist elements in the proletariat, which, however, fell short of seeing the need for revolution and putting that into practice. Thus, not only is it not so that the ideological "defeat must not just leave the class passive", it is already enough to have a proletariat which fails to reach revolutionary levels.

As the crisis unfolds, it inevitably leads to workers' resistance. The bourgeoisie will meet these resistances as they come. We all agree that these resistances can only end in defeat for the working class before the revolution comes. That's exactly it. The bourgeoisie meets these resistances as they come and, depending on the combativity of the workers, crushes them more or less violently. The defeats, by themselves, already provide the best economic, ideological (seeing the hopelessness of struggle) and physical demoralisation. On the other hand it is, of course, possible that the defeats eventually lead to revolutionary consciousness (which, as it happened in the last revolutionary wave, may only come when war has already begun, though the chances of this being successful, if it did happen in the next world war, seem pretty slim, but that is another question), but until this day comes, there's no stopping the bourgeoisie going to war. It is, of course, best for the bourgeoisie to prevent this possibility by having the proletariat so profoundly defeated ideologically that it adheres "enthusiastically to bourgeois ideals", but what's best is not the same as what's necessary. Thus what's best for the bourgeoisie, for example a series of ideological 'campaigns' (14) against the working class aimed at such a profound ideological defeat, is not the same as what's necessary for it to wage war.

It is, as said, enough for the bourgeoisie that the proletariat is non-revolutionary to be able to wage war. Such a proletariat will willy-nilly troop to the factories and produce for the war. If it rises in occasional resistance, it will be crushed as the Russian proletariat was during 1915 and 1916, and unless it rises in revolution, the war goes on. Thus, on a different level from that discussed in 1. above, it is again clear that the courses to war and revolution do not exclude one another.

In my discussions with some ICC comrades, I asked whether the British proletariat was or was not mobilized during the Falklands war. The answer was that the majority was indifferent. That's precisely it. Indifference (in fact even less) is all that's required for war to be successfully waged, not enthusiasm for bourgeoisie ideals.

As to the so-called ideological 'campaigns' the bourgeoisie is supposed to be consciously waging against the proletariat, it need only be added, on top of what's already been said earlier, that nationalism (a major plank in these 'campaigns') is 'natural' to the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie 'instinctively' knows that nationalism is in its interests and whips it up at every opportunity, and at any time (an international football match, launching of a spaceship, etc). Even disregarding the bourgeoisie's 'consciousness' question, there is no need for it to know that whipping up nationalism helps it to defeat the proletariat, it knows the other side of the same thing 'instinctively'.

3. If the left loses its 'credibility' ...

The question of the ideological 'campaigns' have already been discussed. That is why, the ICC says, it's so important for the bourgeoisie to push its left into opposition. If this assumption held, revolution would have been much easier than it actually is. Unfortunately, we all know the gulf between losing all confidence in the system and seeing the need and possibility to overthrow it and to establish something totally new. The former can just as well, in fact in most cases does, lead to utter demoralisation. Again, just as in 2., even disregarding the bourgeoisie's 'consciousness' question, what's best for the bourgeoisie is not the same as what's necessary. On a third level, therefore, the courses towards war and revolution have again been shown not to be exclusive of one another.

Was fascism consciously created to ideologically defeat the working class? And that in order that the war required in 1929 could be waged eventually in 1939? In my previous text I said questions like these, though perfectly legitimate, fail to tackle the issues the ICC is trying to address (the current needs of capital, etc): ie, those on a genuinely theoretical level. (15) I now realise that they do in fact involve a methodological issue, namely the one I tackled at the beginning: the 'consciousness' question as the link between an analysis of capital's need and the actions of the bourgeoisie. This text, however, still maintains that a genuine theoretical critique of the ICC's Left in Opposition perspective must also address the issues of capital's needs, etc. What this means, it is now clear, is that such a critique must only be part of an overall critique of all the relative perspectives. This is what I have tried to do in the present text, and hope to have accomplished.

As a final word I must mention that I agree with

the ICC in one sense, though only in this one sense, namely, that unlike the 1930's the prospects of revolution are much better today. (Some of the arguments the ICC uses to support its Historic Course perspective are, in themselves, valid.) Despite Poland (a physical, economic and

ideological defeat), the working class has not yet been defeated like it was in the 1930's.

L. L. M.

August 1983

Footnotes

(1) Hereinafter, by the ICC, I refer to its majority for I understand some of its members are against the majority's view of the Left in Opposition, the Historic Course and the consciousness of the bourgeoisie perspectives.

(2) 'Created' is the correct word. In its recent 5th International Congress, two proposed amendments to the resolution on the International Situation which proposed to amend the original draft to the effect of laying stress on the use made of the pacifist movements by the bourgeoisie were voted down.

(3) Maybe now the ICC wants to change that view. Or maybe it will incorporate Nicaragua's present role as part of the bourgeoisie's plan in 1979, according to which pacifist 'campaigns' would have been necessary today?

(4) Admittedly we won't see a repeat of the protectionist drama of the 1930's due to the formation of the two imperialist blocs. But protectionism is still a manifestation of capital's crisis. The accompanying nationalism being whipped up is another matter to be dealt with below.

(5) Or 'class confrontation' as the ICC now redefines its perspective, for revolution is not guaranteed.

(6) We must, of course, be careful in analysing the current upturn in the US. That is, how much of it is real, how much fictitious in terms of capital accumulation and not simple GNP figures.

(7) For a feeble attempt to analyse this question in a few sentences see the text "The Historic Course" in International Review no 18, page 20. As to the recent graphs in International Review

and elsewhere, the reader doesn't reminding that they do not constitute any analyses at all.

(8) Does the proletariat 'prepare' for revolution a la the bourgeoisie's preparation for war? That is, does the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat develop in an accumulative manner? However it is, of course, possible for the ICC to define 'preparing' in another way.

(9) The same suspension of history thesis is, inevitably, apparent.

(10) Frolich, P. Rosa Luxemburg, Pluto, 1972, page 166

(11) See *ibid.*, pages 201-2

(12) That this did happen in the 1930's was exactly the reason why Bilan was able to analyse the historic course so accurately.

(13) Mobilization for war doesn't only mean conscripting soldiers but also getting production on a war footing, ie, producing primarily for war. Thus it's wrong for some critics of the ICC to say that the ICC has an outdated view of trench warfare for the third world war when it talks about mobilization of the proletariat for war.

(14) The 'consciousness' question of the bourgeoisie in the question of such 'campaigns' has already been dealt with.

(15) For example, the text, "ICC: Marxist Contradictions", in the Bulletin no 4, whose excellent first part (up to the end of the section, "SDF Capitalist Construct"), though vividly demonstrating the absence of any methodological rigour on the part of the ICC, nevertheless still fails to disprove the perspective on a methodological and theoretical level.

NOTES

1. Photocopies of the text on Decadence in RP 2 are available from me. Send one pound to the CBG address. My discussions with the London Workers' Group indicate that one of the main reasons for the rejection of the concept of decadence by some revolutionaries is the inadequacy of the ICC's defence of it.
2. There is not sufficient space here for a critique of Lenin's economics, his "Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism", which the PCInt endorses. A step in the direction of that crucial critique can be found in RP 17, in a text which rightly condemns Lenin's analysis as unMarxist; the theory of monopolies and superprofits (workers in the West have been 'bought off' by the superprofits of Imperialism) is theoretically unsound, empirically wrong, and politically class-divisive.
3. No matter how much the Trevor-Ropers of the CWO try to rewrite history, this is made clear even in RP. In a review of the ICC pamphlet La Gauche Communiste d'Italie, in RP 21, they show in spite of themselves that Bordiga's attitude to the GL after 1920 actually led to arguing for the liquidation of the communist vanguard in Germany (the KAPD) into the centrist swamp (the KPD). "He also criticised their (the KAPD's) sympathies with syndicalism." true,

but the CWO fails to mention that he supported "the conquest of the unions" at that time, and that the PCInt still think he was right! Any honest communist would have to include this fact in a review on the Italian Left question. The review also tries to avoid the Italian Left's errors on the Russian question by the following sleight-of-hand: "Dismissing their (the KAPD's) analysis of the Russian revolution as 'bourgeois', he regarded defence of October as the starting point of communist politics." Firstly, it is at most a half-truth to say that the KAPD regarded the Russian revolution as bourgeois - this was a later degeneration. They initially supported it - for example they organised military attacks on trains bound for the White armies fighting Russia, as part of their vanguard role in the class struggle - and then began to struggle to understand how Russia had become capitalist. In Gorter's "Reply to Lenin", the KAPD leader supports the Russian state. Most of them wrongly concluded that the Russian revolution was initially bourgeois. But Bordiga continued to "defend October" and the Stalinist state as proletarian up to and during the 2nd world war. The CWO 'forgets' to point this out.
4. This was during the discussion on method in the CWO, when it was being argued that the CWO position on the unions comes from the Italian Left.

Continued from page.

39