solidarity

DOUBLE ISSUE

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STATE OF THE UNION

The main trend in politics, in Britain and other West European countries, during the present economic recession is the emergence of the trade union bureaucracy as the dominant partner in the ruling triumvirate: Government - Industry - Unions.

No decision on wages and prices (or on health, education or social security) can be implemented without the consent of the TUC. The union leaders are no longer merely 'informed' about policies after they have been decided. Their prior endorsement is secured, and it is often their proposals or amendments which are implemented.

The last two years have clearly shown that those entrusted with profit-making (either in the private or in the public sector) can no longer manage society by themselves. Although in capitalist 'democracies' important economic decisions may not be initiated by the union leaders, it is within the union apparatus (rather than in Parliament, in the Cabinet, in party political offices or in Army or Police Headquarters) that the power to impose them currently lies. All this is cemented by people's internalised acceptance of this 'reality'. No economic policy can today be implemented without the consent of the TUC. The TUC can defeat any government, parliament or party. Its pledge 'not to defeat a Labour Government' expresses, quite bluntly, its massive limitations. A TUC which defeats a Labour Government could even more readily defeat any conceivable alternative government. But then the union hierarchies would have power thrust upon them. This is the one thing they wish to avoid for it would reveal to all the full scope of their impotence. They refuse to change the system and their own role within it, for both are intimately interlinked.

Company boardrooms alone cannot run society any longer. The trade union bureaucracies do not wish to run it. Ordinary people are told they can't. The result is that it is those who see society as a socio-economic machine (whether they be called Heath, Dennis Healey, Soares or Berlinguer who take over the job of keeping things ticking. If society is nothing morethan a value-free socio-economic mechanism, it could be managed by a computer programme. But if it is about people and the conflict of interests and values, then politics is not merely about the parameters of the paradigm, it is about the paradigm itself.

We apologise to readers for the delay in the appearance of this issue. We would like to draw their attention to the envisaged production, later this year, of a substantial book 'PORTUGAL : THE DIFFICULT REVOLUTION' which deals in depth with one of the most significant events of the post-war era. (Estimated cost will be between £1 and £1.50 and orders are welcome as from now.) Also strongly recommended is the new pamphlet produced by the National Working Group : 'URBAN DEVASTATION' (the planning of incarceration) by James Finlayson (25p + postage).

PORTUGUESE DIARY

April 19, 1976, a Radio Televisao Portugues crew, in a van, is doing a programme on 'the vision of socialism'. It is stopping in the street, at factory gates, in markets, talking to people and recording their replies. It's a tight fit inside: 7 people and lots of equipment.

We make for Barreiro, an industrial town accross the river from Lisbon. Once there, there is no problem getting to the giant CUF chemical works. The sky is grey, part cloud, part smoke. The walls are grey too, but bespattered with the red of posters. The plant, the stacks, the water towers hovering above us look as if built in the last century. Long streets of hangars, stores, sheds, many with broken windows. There is noise, and rust and the plaster is peeling off the front of many buildings. Heavy smells hang in the air. The road is in poor repair. An old-fashioned capitalism clearly cohabits with the new.

We pass through mean little streets of minute, decrepit terraced housing. 'Sulphuric Acid Street.' 'Candle Grease Street.' Capitalism even murders the imagination. The houses were built six, seven decades ago, possibly more. People still live there - sort of.

This is the heartland of the PCP, its ideological and physical domain. It's posters are everywhere. A gigantic PCP balloon is tied to a rope between two rooftops. 'Unity with the MFA'. 'Vote PCP'. The van stops and the crew take up their positions near one of the back gates. Shifts are changing. It is 4 pm. The producer talks to a group of women of indeterminate age, going in. They are not in the least shy and talk readily. 'Socialism?' - 'A steady job!' - 'Like this?' - No answer. A steady drizzle is falling. 'Like this?' the producer repeats. The women, sensing something strange, turn on him, abuse the television, and march off, their fists raised, shouting 'PCP! PCP!'.

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There are joyful moments, too. Walking along the Tagus waterfront, between the Station and the Praca do Comercio we stop in front of a particularly fine example of mural art. Enormous. Unforgettable. 'Socialist realism' at its hideous best.

The reds and yellows are gaudy as usual - caricatures of real colour. The oppressed have very square jaws, very short hair, enormous arms, a very determined look. The proletariat, as seen by the Maoists is clearly more brawn than brain: the sort of animal any skilful leninist could easily ride to the revolution!

But the anarcho-cynicalists have been at work. Modern capitalism requires modern transport. The MRPP leader is calling for a cab.

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Another story about taxis. In Elvas, in the East some of the estates belonging to big landlords have been taken over by those who work them. The usual pattern is for the agricultural workers to occupy first and seek authority later - from the local center of the IRA (Institute for Agricultural Reorganisation.)

One recently expropriated latifundiario (latifundista in Spanish) also happened to own the biggest taxi business in town. His drivers disliked him heartily and were much impressed with the new goings on in the co-operative. So they took over the taxis.

But the cult of authority dies hard. The act had to be 'legitimised', entered 'in the books'. So the cab drivers all turn up one morning at the IRA Headquarters for an 'official' sanction. The Ministry of Agriculture has files on tenants, trees, toros... and technical aid - but nothing on how legally to appropriate a fleet of taxis. The Revolution creates its own surrealist precendents.

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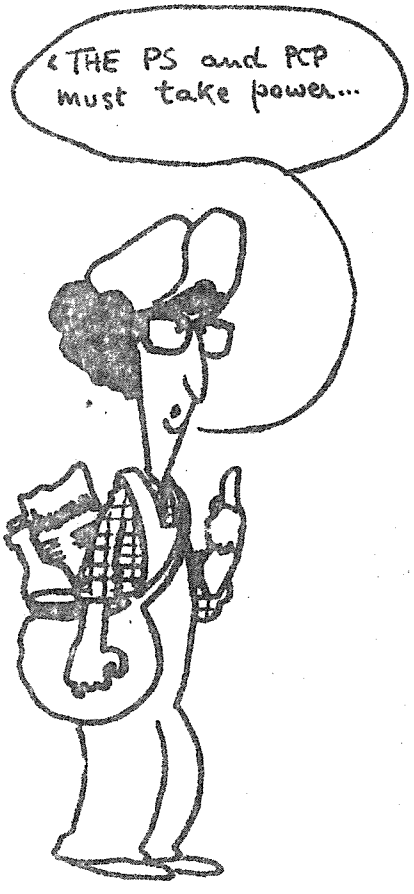
May Day, 1976. Top of the Avenida Almirante Reis in Lisbon. The demonstration called by Intersindical is marching past. Municipal workers in their Sunday best. Railway workers in serried ranks, decorated lorries packed with agricultural workers carrying pitchforks. Occasional singing. Very occasional laughter. Sellers do a roaring trade in political stickers, selling to those watching the procession: stickers for the Association of Collectivised Farms, for the Housing Fund, for student or women's groups. Schoolteachers, building workers, hospital workers chant 'Intersindical, Intersindical' as they pass, ten or twelve abreast. Twenty thousand people march by - apparently far fewer than last year. The traffic has prudently been stopped, although Portuguese motorists have learnt patience - the hard way.

It is a fine warm day. Banners, unbelievably, still demand 'Unity with the MFA' - the very MFA which is now the main brake on the revolution. They also demand the right to full employment and vigilance against the fascists.

Do I sense a certain weariness? There is none of the exaltation, of the euphoria of even a few months ago - as if people realised that it would take more than mural graffiti to bring down the walls of capital. The Party is everywhere, though nowhere in its true garb. In the Association of University Professors. In the Association of Municipal Associations. The bank employees march by shouting 'No to Reaction!' One or two Tenants' Committees carry colourful banners... demanding government loans. The two groups march next to each other. Someone should introduce them to one another!

At the end of the procession a mass of red flags and a few hundred very young people shouting raucously: 'Unidad sindical, unidad sindical'. One might be dreaming. They want the PCP and PS to take power, in order to expose them. And Intersindical too. To form a government 'without generals or capitalists'. Yes, the Trots. In their rightful place. At the tail-end of a Stalinist demonstration.

M.B.



Trot pretending to share the illusions he attributes to the proletariat

from

A LETTER FROM PORTUGAL

... The LCI-PRT presented, together, a "worker-candidate" - a woman who had been a prisoner in Caxias and who had joined LCI soon before Nov. 25th. She was dynamic and told of her imprisonment. After presenting the candidate and formalising everything the prison authorities let the cat out of the bag: she'd been imprisoned for stealing a fridge. The Trots thought this disgraceful (as they'd thought she was a "political" prisoner) and abandoned the whole idea. The current joke is that the Trots are like the "paras": mislead all the time. They're now supporting Octavio Pato (PCP - translated literally as the 8th duck - as a few newspapers have pointed out). Otelo is getting more support than Art Sullivan or a pop-star would: he is colourful.

"I've never read the whole of Capital" he said to a crowd of 50,000 in Porto "but I get the idea". Pinheiro de Azevedo says the official report on Nov. 25th "shocked him as to the lies a government could tell" and threatens to squeal on everyone if he is not elected. Its a farce. But Eanes is very very dangerous and can be used by all sorts. It may have very surprising results, this election...

RECENT PAMPHLETS

THE NEW MOVEMENT (10p plus postage) by Henri Simon. The movement emerging out of struggles now. 'The New Movement is not what some... can think of to liberate others. The New Movement is what each and all create by themselves in their struggle, for their struggle, in their own interest...'

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE CRITIQUE OF MARX (10p plus postage) by John Crump. A joint Solidarity/Social Revolution pamphlet. '... the communist ideology which Marx elaborated was precisely what he himself meant by the term "ideology" - a set of ideas which (even when intrinsically correct) mask rather than reveal the real problem...'

SPONTANEITY AND ORGANISATION (10p plus postage) by Murray Bookchin. A reprint of this thought provoking essay first published in Liberation and Anarchos magazines in 1972. 'The tragedy of the socialist... movement is that opposes organisation to spontaneity and tries to assimilate the social process to political and organisational instrumentalism'.

COUNTER-CULTURE & REPRESSION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

It is accepted by libertarians that the social revolution involves the most profound cultural revolution. This is implicitly accepted by ruling elites who at the best disparage and at the worst openly repress any signs of grass-roots cultural non-conformity. In Britain the authorities are experienced enough to co-opt or recuperate much of the counter-culture. Part of the resilience of the British elite lies in the pragmatic clothes of ruling-class ideology. This flexibility is precluded by the dogmatic nature of the ruling ideology in Czechoslovakia. Here the shining ideals of socialism cannot hide the rotteness of everyday existence. The gap between official pronouncements on the ever-increasing beauty of everyday life and the realities of repression, inflation, cultural conformity, bribery, shortages, official incompetance and bureaucratic hussling warp and distort the lives of the whole nation. For this reason, any movement that even implicitly gives the lie to the official double-think machine draws upon itself the whole odium of the state. The decaying corpse cannot bear the fresh flowers growing on the nutrient of its disintegration.

At the end of March this year about 20 members of two counter-culture groups were arrested. The arrests of the 'Plastic People of the Universe' and 'DG-307' were reported in the western press but little was said about the background to the arrests or what exactly the groups were supposed to have done. I do not want to eulogise these particular groups, Solidarity readers will be all too familiar with the deficiences of the western counter-culture movement of the 1960's. These reservations apply equally to that of eastern Europe. But the fact of a counter-culture eight years after social conformity had been reinforced by Soviet tanks is in itself remarkable enough.

The Plastic People are, in fact, one of the oldest underground groups, having been formed in 1967. DG-307 is a much more recent formation. One of the regime's rationalisations about 'normalisation' is that they have succeded in stabilising the economy and have in fact increased the availability of consumer goods and the purchasing power of the population. In short, the regime has established a form of 'communist consumerism'. DG-307 refers to the medical code for a 'disease' characterised by temporary mental disturbance brought about in otherwise normal people by high stress. The main emphasis of this group's work is the boredom and sterility of life in the new communist consumer society. However the Plastic People were the forerunners of groups like this and it is on them that the police have concentrated most of their attention.

The importance that the authorities attached to the arrests can be judged from the fact that on April 7 and 8 there was a saturation coverage in the press and on radio and TV. The Minister of the Interior's justification makes interesting reading for those who can read between the lines of East European official statements: 'Far from being musicians, poets or artists, they were a band of delinquent drug addicts, drop-outs, parasites, malingerers, failed

priests and psychiatric cases who, under the pretext of holding 'musical' concerts, indulged in orgies of dope-taking and wanton destruction of property. Their songs were full of obscenities and could scarcely be considered music at all since almost none of those arrested had any formal musical education." He went on to argue that every society had the right to defend itself against such anti-social elements. It was only after all other attempts to discourage them by preventative 'educational' means had failed that the authorities had resorted to arrest. It is interesting to see exactly what the Minister had in mind when he talked of 'preventative education'. In 1971, as a result of new standards laid down for rock groups, the Plastic People lost their professional status. In other words they could no longer work as musicians. In Czechoslovakia the 'Right to Work' means that if you are unemployed for more than eight weeks you can be sent to prison. The consequence was that the group had to work at non-musical jobs. The authorities hoped that this would kill the group. However they continued to play in their spare time, in cellars, private flats, empty rooms etc. The content of the group's work is the main point of interest. By 1972 they had just about stopped importing music from British and American groups and they started to put contemporary Czech poetry to music. Unfortunately, as far as I know, there are no English translations of the type of work they chose. It did consist, however, of poems of the last 20 years and most of it was an attack on 'official culture'.

The arrest and harassment of 20 individuals, followed by a national propaganda exercise to justify this action is symptomatic of a profound sickness in social life. Contemporary Stalinism is a most powerful generator of alienation. The forms of social domination have been changed but the social relations in terms of the people's alienation from the products of their labour have been reinforced, and reinforced on a scale yet unknown in the West. The meaning of the failure of Soviet agriculture, of the obselete Czech economy, of the massive loans required by Poland from the West is that the peoples of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are working to rule. This is the crisis of Stalinism. It is the key to understanding why in the Soviet Union, combine harvesters stand idle two thirds of the time when they are required. (H. Ticktin in Critique 4) In Czechoslovakia the rot in public morale shows itself in more sophisticated ways. The price of secure entry into a medical school for a student is the payment of a car or a country cottage to a university administrator. Unthinking sabotage is the norm. In Nov. 1975, the President of Czechoslovakia opened a new steel smelting factory with electronic control systems imported from W. Germany. Very soon the control system broke down... It was found that 140,000 D.Marks worth of electronic equipment had been stolen. The police later found that this equipment had been converted into musical amplifiers by the local youth union!

It is against this background, well known and deeply worrying to the authorities, of total demoralisation that the existance of the counter-culture must be seen. The innate creativity of the people has not been totally suppressed, it continues to find alternative ways of expressing itself. This is the real meaning of the counter-culture, and it is a meaning that frightens the authorities shitless.

P. Cerny (London)

SPAIN: TWO DOCUMENTS

The following material gives us an insight into some problems and the responses to them of the Spanish working class. Faced with a state controlled union and a vicious regime they have in recent months taken steps along the path of autonomous self-organisation. Since the death of Franco a wave of strikes demands for amnesty for political prisoners and demands for 'democratic reforms' of one sort and another have shaken the rulers of Spain in a way they have not been shaken since the days of the Republic. As the number of people involved in various struggles has increased, the forms of the struggle have changed. The following piece on the Barcelona Telephones illustrates a movement from the Workers Commissions to a more widely democratic assembly structure. The second piece, from the Barcelona docks, illustrates some of the difficulties that face these assemblies. Conversations with people who have recently come from Spain have revealed how rapidly things are moving there. We will try and bring any further developments to our reader's notice. One point that should be made immediately perhaps is that the C.N.T., the anarcho-syndicalist union, has been reconstituted inside Spain and is growing rapidly. Already, however, an internal debate has developed sparked off by younger militants who consider its 1930's style structure over-bureaucratic and are pressing for a reorganisation which increases branch autonomy. This pressure stems directly from their experience of the workers assemblies. At the same time the state controlled union is making attempts to incorperate this and other developing dissident unions. In Spain, as everywhere, autonomous action and recuperation dance their minuet.

Barcelona telephones

This article is based on an interview with a cable worker earlier this year. He is one of 54,000 telephone workers in Spain of which 8,400 are in Catalonia (5,300 in Barcelona). The telephone company is 44% owned by the government, 26% by the workers and private shareholders and the rest by ITT. Before the strike this year there had been one isolated dispute in 1973 involving 800 workers.

'In January our collective contract was up. The cost of living had gone up a lot but the Company told us that the new contract would take another 3 - 4 months to come through. We asked for an advance payment but this was refused so we started to organise around the demand for 6,000 pesetas increase until the new contract was agreed. This struggle was led by the Comisiones Obreros (Workers Commissions, CCOO for short) of which I am a member.

'Our CO was formed by those most interested in defending the interests of the working class. In general they were people from political parties of various tendencies. Altogether there are 40 - 50 people out of which particular committees are elected: Strike Committee, Information Committee etc. In meetings of the body of the workers the members of the CCOO do everything they can to develop the struggle. The CCOO meet in churches and empty buildings and one of our meetings took place in a college. Because the CCOO are clandestine they have to take security measures. The news of a meeting is passed privately from person to person. During the meetings someone keeps watch to see if there is any movement by the police outside or anything suspicious. The strike committee has the job of approaching the workers to explain the necessity for a strike and the best ways of struggling against the company. It calls assemblies of the workers. The Information Committee has the job of publicising the struggle and keeping the workers informed.

'In January we went on strike. We began on a Tuesday with a stoppage of half an hour which was to progress day by day to reach a total stoppage by the Saturday. But the Strike Committee called off the strike after four days and accepted an offer of 4,000 pesetas rather than the 6,000 we wanted. We had said that we would only go back to work if a general assembly of the workers decided on it. But rumours began circulating that some workers had already gone back to work and that we'd lost the struggle. Co-ordination between Madrid, Barcelona and Bilbao functioned badly and this was the main reason why the strike was not continued; even the time of the stoppage was not co-ordinated between the various districts. By April we were on strike again, however. Given the breakdown of the previous strike we discussed in a general assembly of the workers the best methods of continuing the struggle. It was decided that in order to avoid rumours which could destry unity we should have assemblies in each work place which would elect a delegate to a co-ordinating committee which would meet in the evenings. (This general assembly took place in the state controlled union building, incidentally.)

'The Company now said that the new contract would take 5 - 6 months to work out rather than the 2 - 3 months they had originally said. We decided to enter into struggle again. This time our organisation was different. In January the strike was started and led by the CO. But this meant in practice that 40 - 50 people could direct a struggle that belonged to all the workers. In April all the workers took part in the struggle through their assemblies in the workplaces. We held a general assembly which decided on strike action. Initially, however, only some 20% of the workforce in Barcelona and Catalonia came out on strike. Madrid had been on strike for two days though it was not complete. In Barcelona, however, more and more people joined the struggle every day and after 4 days 90% of the plant was out. At the general assembly we had decided that there should be a committee To Extend the Strike and another Committee of Information. The 'Committee of Extension' had the job of keeping in touch with and travelling to discuss with workers in Catalonia Madrid and Bilbao (where the struggle was strongest). The Information Committee published many leaflets explaining the aims of the strike and gave news to the press. The leaflets were distributed at peaceful demonstrations where 4,000 workers went to different working class districts, the city centre,

the markets. Here the Information Committee explained the struggle to the Neighbourhood Associations (Associones de Vecinos) and other committees and social centres.

'One reason why the Company would not give into our demands was because the exchanges were automatic. We decided to sabotage the connections between the major towns by making calls in such numbers as to jam the lines. In Barcelona we were able to jam 60,000. We intended to keep the most important lines open but we were evicted from the exchanges and were unable to do so. We explained this in leaflets we handed out. The French, English and Italian unions gave us support through CIT. 40% of international calls were boycotted and by the Sunday it was planned that it would be a total boycott. Unfortunately this did not come about, as we shall see.

'At the beginning of the struggle we stayed in the social centres but the police threw us out. We then gathered in the Plaza Cataluna (the central square in Barcelona). We went in groups passing out leaflets and information bulletins to passers-by. If there was a company near an Exchange people would go and explain why we were striking. We organised collections for each Exchange. Unfortunately, though, the strike collapsed. The strike looked as though it would continue over the holidays (Holy Week) which made things difficult. Then, at the last assembly it was learned that the contract had been taken to the Labour Court and the Company had announced that those workers who did not return to work while the Court was sitting would be dismissed. Then on Holy Thursday the Company gave us until mid-day to return to work and threatened dismissal for all those who did not. People began to be afraid and in many Exchanges they returned to work.

'It is worth making some further comments. The political parties played no important role in the strike since they had no longer the means to control the strike through the CCOO. The new "struggle committees" meant that the CCOO could not direct the struggle but had to accept the will of the assembly. Ideally the CCOO should co-ordinate the struggles within the company and with other companies as an independant workers' movement. At the present time they are unable to do this because they are manipulated by the political parties. At the present time we are waiting to see what sanctions the Company will take against the workers who went on strike and we will then take counter-measures.'

Barcelona docks

The following piece is taken from a clandestine dockers' newspaper: 'We think it would be a good thing to think about the latest conflicts we have seen in the docks, even if we can't cover everything. We might come up with some solutions which could serve us in future struggles.

'The Assembly, as a means of discussing all our problems must be the standard way of resolving all the situations that face us. The assembly must not be monopolised by anyone. Everyone should take part in it to combat the passivity of the majority. This passivity often stems from the difficulty of hearing and understanding the person speaking although we have some little experience of this kind of meeting. Some technical measures might help - for example a megaphone. We should have someone, not necessarily always the same person to act as chairman co-ordinating the discussion and synthesising ideas to make discussion easier.

'Information. People who are elected at assemblies as representatives and are charged with a particular task should keep the assembly continuously informed. Elected representatives must propose only what the assembly has decided, adding nothing. We saw in the last conflict how information was not brought to the assembly. Our first demands voted by the assembly were changed to others in view of the negative response of the boss and we were not informed.

'The Strike. This showed that dockers can unite at a given moment in response to the injustices of the bosses, the authorities and the union bureaucrats. But the assembly at which it was decided to return to work was an example of what we should not allow to happen. During the whole meeting we allowed the bureaucrats to say what they liked. There were people who had nothing to do with us or our problems reminding us constantly of the danger involved in continuing the stoppage and making all kinds of threats. Promises were made - on condition we didn't make too much noise and behaved ourselves - promises that the bosses couldn't and didn't want to carry out. At that assembly we voted that we would not give way over our proposals and we called for the dismissal of inefficient union representatives. Yet our point were not agreed to, neither were there any reprentatives removed. Everything had been got back to normal - yet we did not go back on strike.'

NOTES ON ITALY

1. ITALY THIS SUMMER

As you read these lines, the Italian elections have probably already been held (this article was written in mid-May); political negotiations are probably going on which might bring the Communist Party into the government; and some of you may be thinking of Italy as a vacation choice for the revolutionary tourist. What follows may help you to choose and in the process, I hope, dispel some illusions and stimulate some debate.

I don't apologise for the somewhat 'marxist' flavour of this article: ample space accorded to the economic crisis, analysis of the ruling class and of the trad left, etc. To concentrate exclusively on the working class and the libertarian left doesn't help one to understand them better, rather the opposite: nothing is grasped of the situation in which they fight, the strength of their enemies, etc., so no real understanding is possible of the importance, the deficiencies and the potentialities of their struggles. Marxist traditional attempts at overall analyses, at 'grasping the nature of the historical epoch', are not wrong in what they attempt, but rather in their actual limitations. If attention is always focused exclusively on the same sector of society, one's vision tends to become partial and parochial; the sense of what one is at and where one is going, and the capacity to feel what is achievable and what is not, gradually get lost. Over-optimistic expectations are then easily followed by disappointment and despair (over Portugal, for instance).

2. SOME BACKGROUND

Is Italy going to become state capitalist? Is it heading towards a big social clash, like in Chile? Is the situation there promising for the libertarian left?

These questions arise because an unexpectedly large leftward swing of public opinion has made a United-Popular type of cabinet (with the PCI - Italian Communist Party - and the PSI - Italian Socialist Party - plus, perhaps, smaller groups) enjoying <u>majority</u> support in Parliament, a very probable outcome of the present elections.

The main cause of this shift is clearly the patent inability of the Christian Democratic Party (DC - Democracia Cristiana) to get Italy out of its worsening economic crisis.

The origins of the crisis are to be found in the economic choices immediately after World War II. Italy emerged from that war a semi-industrialised nation with low industrial and agricultural productivity.

The PCI, having decided that a revolution was impossible, set about helping the transition of Italy towards social democracy, and perhaps socialism after that (accepting, in practice, a new form of Bernstein-type strategy). At that point two roads were available for the Italian economy: protectionism, or liberalism. The USA was pushing for the second in Italy, Germany, and Japan. In Japan protectionism was maintained and the result is Japan's present-day economic strength. In Germany the economic base was very strong (and much less damaged by the war than is usually supposed) and liberalisation thus allowed Germany to compete in foreign markets.

In Italy, protectionism never had a chance, for the additional reason that the new bourgeoisie had to distinguish itself from Fascism, whose economic policy had been protectionist. So liberalism (and later membership of the EEC) was imposed. The result was to allow an 'economic miracle' with grave hidden weaknesses, which were to become apparent in later years. The impulse to growth came from industries which needed only moderate capital investment, and not too advanced a technology: mainly consumer durables industries - cars, televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, etc. The technologically more advanced components of their products were, anyway, usually imported from abroad. Low Italian wages guaranteed international competitiveness.

The Italian 'economic miracle' of 1951-63 (average growth rate 5.3%, rising to 6.6% in 1959-63, second only to Japan and Germany among capitalist nations) was thus essentially based on low wages. These made up for the weaknesses of the Italian economic structure, particularly technological inferiority, by allowing Italian labour-intensive industry to compete internationally.

But this situation couldn't last for ever. Rapid economic growth itself decreased unemployment, which had been kept high by agricultural reforms that distributed land but in so doing fragmented land holdings; many of the latter were too small for profitable utilisation, especially in the south, so that migration to the north continued. But at the end of the fifties demand for labour, especially skilled labour, started rising faster than supply. The bargaining power of the working class rose; and at the same time its mood was changing too, in the direction of greater militancy.

The northern industrial working class had been taking in many young workers and many 'immigrant' workers from the south. These proved to be not only combative, but also less concerned than the older generation with questions of party and ideology. The new workers were thus able to achieve a certain unity of struggle that had eluded the leadership of the politically and ideologically divided unions.* Also, for the most part, the

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* Besides the main socialist-communist trade union federation (CGIL) there also exist in Italy a DC TU federation (CISL) and a social-democratic one (UIL). The last two were created in the early fifties, with the help of US money, to weaken the CGIL, which remains nonetheless bigger than the two others put together.

new generation of workers was absorbed in the assembly lines of expanding industry. Here the fragmentation of the work process and the reduced level of skill required for each task began to break down the old hierarchy of labour and the attitude of craft-professionalism typical of older skilled workers.

Thus it is at the start of the sixties that the problem which still exists today begins to emerge: continued industrialisation required control over a working class of growing strength, in a country where, on the contrary, the working class (until then relatively small) and the organisations representing it were totally excluded from official politics, and the whole political machine was controlled by organisations - the DC and other smaller parties - which were the expression of the alliance of industry with a parasitic, backward landlord class and middle class. From the early sixties some sections of the bourgeoisie advanced the project of modifying Italy's political structure in the direction of co-opting the working class for the development of Italian capitalism via a social-democratic solution. The social forces interested in industrial expansion were able to impose a centre-left Cabinet(DC, PSI and smaller parties) in 1963. Its task was to keep the working class quiet by effecting some reforms, e.g. a public housing programme, more hospitals, more schools, better pensions, etc.

The urgency of the programme was made clear by the first victories of the working class. In 1962, after several years of growing labour unrest and unsatisfactory contract settlements, all the main categories of workers went out on strike. The number of hours lost in strikes that year was the highest since the war, and would be topped only by the massive strikes of 1969. Average hourly wages for industrial workers jumped 18.6% between 1962 and '63.

This was enough to bring out the weaknesses of the Italian economy. Capitalists answered by raising prices; but in this way they lost some international competitiveness, while at the same time the increased spending power of the workers was increasing imports, especially of agricultural products. (The deterioration of Italian agriculture also meant a lower national agricultural product, especially meat, produced at higher costs, which in turn meant increased dependence on foreign imports). The deficit in the balance of payments was cured by a restrictive credit policy which, together with the squeeze on profits caused by higher wages, started a two-year recession.

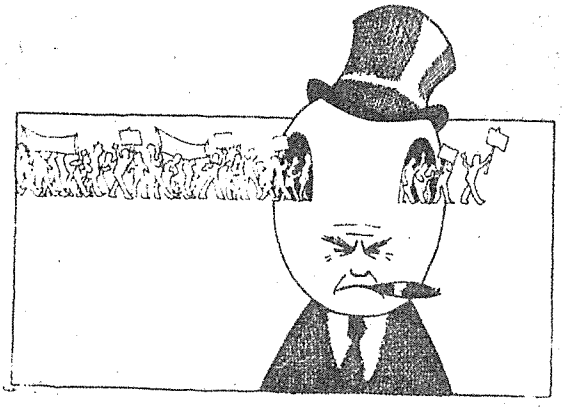
This crisis weakened the working class. But at the same time it weakened those social forces inside the bourgeoisie which were interested in the shift towards social-democracy. Thus the centre-left Cabinets made almost no reforms, and the few which were approved were not implemented at all, or only very slowly and partially. The problem of 'controlling' the working class was not solved. The temporary weakness of the latter allowed a further spurt of growth in 1966-68, but this was obtained essentially by speed-up, with next to no investment in more modern technology. Thus the industrial structure was becoming more antiquated, and internationally less competitive,

just when economic growth was reabsorbing unemployment, worsening work conditions were making the workers increasingly angry, and the political scene was witnessing the birth, in Italy too, of the new international source of unrest, the student movement.

The trades unions' gradual loss of control over workers' struggles, and the growth of the student movement went together. In '67 and '68 the majority of Italian universities saw occupations, fights with the police and with the fascists, demonstrations, etc. From the very first, the students nearly everywhere harshly criticised the PCI and the TUs controlled by it as reformist and betrayers of the revolution. This radical stance, and contacts between students and workers, contributed to the weakening of the latter's allegiance to trade unions and PCI. Wildcats, unofficial strikes, go-slows and sabotage increased rapidly in '67 and '68.

The trade unions - all of them, even those tied to the DC - had to move fast to the left in order not to lose control of the workers completely. In the so-called 'hot autumn' of 1969, when the contracts of all major categories of workers were due for renewal, the trade unions were compelled to demand very big wage increases and some control over the work process, and to support their demands with prolonged strikes - otherwise the workers, supported and incited by thousands of politicised students, would have gone on strike on their own. As it was, the struggle was often not led by the unions, and its forms - occupations, internal demonstrations, etc. - were not favoured by them. After 302 million working hours had been lost in strikes, the demands were won. On average, wages increased by 24%.

This period of struggle also saw the rapid spread of new forms of organisation in the factories: (1) the general assembly of all workers (later, 10 hours per year for such assemblies, in company time, were to be guaranteed by national law); (2) shop 'delegates'; (3) committees composed of these delegates, soon to evolve into 'factory councils' (consigli di fabbrica), which in turn would spawn 'industrial zone councils' (consigli di zona) within the cities, intervening on issues such as housing, etc.



The delegates were elected by, and came directly from the particular shop, work-team, assemby-line section, etc., which they were to represent. Originally, the councils were dominated by very militant workers, often revolutionary, usually very critical of the trade unions (but not of trade unionism). But as they acquired semi-official status they were rapidly recuperated by trade unionists (sometimes the unions started the factory councils themselves). Today this type tends to be in the majority and the councils are usually considered just one more bureaucratic 'mediating' mechanism replacing the trade unions in negotiations over matters which only affect the firm, e.g. work-speed, etc.

The other big novelty was the birth of political organisations composed essentially of students and ex-students, for the most part variously leninist and usually pro-China. Out of these emerged the trree groups now dominating the 'revolutionary left' scene - of which more later.

3. THE BOURGEOISIE

The workers' victory further weakened the Italian economy. Their increased spending power again caused an increase in imports and a consequent deficit in the balance of payments. This was again the excuse for a restrictive economic policy which caused a new crisis, this time accompanied by inflation; but the new strength of the working class remained such that, up to 1974 at least, wages increased faster than prices.

The capitalists' answer was more inflation: 6.4% in 1972, 12.4% in 1973, 21.6% in 1974, over 25% in 1975, increases in the prices of essential goods often being even higher. Further restrictive measures adopted in December '73 resulted in a rapid growth of unemployment. Production had actually declined in 1975; unemployment is now around 6.7% and on the increase. Since 1974, real wages have been eroded. But the economic situation has not improved, and the balance-of-payments problem has become so desperate as to persuade the other EEC members to accept exceptional measures against imports to Italy.*

The crisis is indeed deep. Since 1963-64, Italian capitalists have been investing very little, and the increasing technological lag has made Italian exports less and less competitive. Until 1970, when political fears slowed down the process, numerous firms were being taken over by foreign capital. Italian subordination - already heavy because of debts - increased further.

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* More information, with a slightly diferent slant, on the background to the present Italian crisis is available in J.B. & R. Proctor, 'Italy', Monthly Review, January 1976.

All this caused a crisis of the social coalition (between industry, landlords and middle classes) which had found its expression in the uninterupted rule of the Christian Democrats. This is not a novel phenomenon; in all capitalist nations, which are subordinated to stronger ones (as Italy is to Germany and the USA), there is usually an uneasy coexistence of two clusters of bourgeois interests (corresponding to two possible developments) which in a crisis become two opposed factions. The 'right' or 'colonial' bourgeoisie lives on remnants of outdated privileges (unproductive middle strata, landlords, etc.), on local industries subsidiary to foreign capital, and on the administration in loco of imperialist exploitation of the country; the 'left' or 'nationalist' bourgeoisie is interested in developing national capital in competition against foreign capital. The description 'left' is due to the tendency of the latter to develop an anti-imperialist, populist ideology, often accompanied by the promise - and, if they win, often the implementation - of social-democratic reforms. In this way, the 'left' bourgeoisie seeks to win the working class over to its project of class collaboration between national capital and the workers at the expense of foreign capital, of local groups tied to it, and of some privileges of the middle classes and rentier groups. Hence its readiness to nationalise foreign-owned enterprises, and its populism.

The fights between these two factions are many and easy to recognise, especially in Latin America. In Peru and Venezuela the 'left' bourgeoisie seems to have the upper hand; in Chile the 'left' bourgeois interests explain the Christian Democrats' initial support of Allende's policies; in Argentina, Peronism was a specific form of 'left' bourgeois populism.

Local Communist Parties usually support the left bourgeoisie. In Britain, for instance, the CP's economic programme is very similar to Tony Benn's, and its kernel is protectionism with nationalisation of all big capital, i.e. both foreign-owned multinationals, and the British ones - too much tied to their own foreign interests - , while national 'small' capital is to go untouched.

In Italy, a country in many ways similar to Latin America (corruption, economic privileges of the middle classes, enormous parasitic state bureaucracy, patronage, existence of poor peasants, etc.), the reformist bourgeoisie is not easily distinguishable from the conservative, but the crisis seems to have polarised the factions and to have strengthened the 'left'. State-controlled industry, largely an independent political force, and until recently a DC stronghold, seems to be prepared to shift its allegiance from the DC to the 'left', firing its most compromised directors. The old fight between state-controlled industry and private capital also seems to have been suspended: one of the big bosses of public capital, Cefis, is Vice-President of the Italian equivalent of the CBI, whose President is Agnelli, FIAT's boss; its mouthpiece, Milan's newspaper Il Giorno, is openly reformist. Big private capital's own newspaper, Il Corriere della Sera, the largest and most prestigious Italian daily, is very close to openly advocating the PCI's 'historic compromise' (a PCI-PSI-DC government). In addition, the DC has recently been unable to smother a number of scandals, the latest implicating the Republic's President himself, Leone, in the Lockheed affair. Since this didn't use to happen before, it seems a further sign that an important section of the bourgeoisie has withdrawn its support from the DC.

This shift in the balance of forces within the bourgeoisie has also been influenced by the general swing to the left, shown in the referendum on divorce (May 1974), when 59% of the votes went against a proposal (supported by the Church) to repeal a law admitting divorce in some instances, and again in the local and regional elections of June '75, when the PSI's s share went up 4% and the PCI's 6%, the 'revolutionary' groups mustering almost 2% of the votes (a total of 47.3% for the left). The DC's total loss of credibility due to the latest scandals makes it likely that in the present elections the 47.3% will increase to over 50%. Another important factor is that the DC patronage system, its real basis of support, is being seriously weakened by loss of control over numerous local administrations, and by lack of funds to 'distribute' through various subsidies and other forms of corruption, due to the economic crisis. The latter circumstance, which pre-dated the elections, probably goes some way to explain the crisis of the DC: with a weak ideological basis, the loss of patronage means the loss of a very high proportion of voters. All this clearly compels the bourgeoisie to seek new alliances.

But it is not certain that the 'left' faction, although stronger than before, is strong enough to win, nor that it is ready to accept the entry of the PCI into the government coalition. In a recent interview, Giovanni Agnelli, President of FIAT and traditionally the main spokesman for 'modern' capital, has come out for nationalisation but against the PCI

in power; his brother, also a manager of FIAT, is to be a DC candidate in the elections. Among Italian capitalists there seems to be a hope, in my opinion unfounded, that Italy can be got out of its mess without having to share power with the PCI.

4. THE COMMUNIST PARTY

In other words, the strength of the working class scares the bourgeoisie, which is not certain that the PCI would be able and willing to control the workers. The weakness of the reformist faction of the Italian bourgeoisie goes a long way to explain the PCI's policies.

In Italy a strong social democracy never developed, reflecting precisely the weakness of the reformist forces. The strategy of the PCI after World War II can be characterised as an attempt to make up for this deficiency, and to develop into a social-democratic party, i.e. the instrument for the insertion of the working class into the official political game. This transition from hard-line Stalinism to reformism and co-operation with national capital had to be slow, because of the resistance of the base (still largely blue-collar workers) and because of the weakness of the social-democratic option in a country so backward in so many ways, and with such a high level of class struggle.

Radical, in words and, for as long as there was no chance of getting a share of power, in the institutions, the PCI has let its social-democratic 'soul' emerge as sooh as a chance appeared; but, in view of the militancy of the working class, it has deemed it necessary to make every possible effort not to scare the bourgeoisie. Thus it has proposed the 'historic comprimise', i.e. a DC-PCI collaboration in which it is implicitly conceded that the old power structure preserves wide powers of control and veto. This presupposes a convergence of interests between the working class, elements of the middle class hurt by the crisis, and the 'reformist' bourgeoisie, expressed concretely in the PCI's current programme for 'rationalising' Italian capitalism through reforms and centralised planning - not by further nationalisations but through state ownership (after recent takeovers on a massive scale of firms on the brink of bankruptcy, state holdings control some 50% of Italian industry). The aim is to eliminate inefficient and parasitic sectors of the economy, develop agriculture and domestic energy sources, and favour more production for collective needs.

But this is all to be done within the limits of the present export-orientated model (EEC membership, no protectionism, etc.), and is thus in many ways a more moderate programme than Tony Benn's for the UK, reflecting the greater weakness of the Italian economy (no coal, no North Sea oil, agriculture in bad shape, etc.). Given these constrainsts, and the guarantees that the PCI offers to the old power coalition, it is impossible to imagine that the crisis could be overcome and the 'rationalisation' carried through without working class living standards being sacrificed almost as much as those of the middle classes, and collective consumption decreasing, for a number of years. The PCI knows this. Its plan seems

to be to get the workers to accept it by offering them a bit less inequality of incomes, less corruption, fewer delays in implementing public spending programmes, making buses and trains run on time, and so on. The necessary laws exist already. A reform of taxation, if implemented - which it hasn't been so far, after three years - would of itself drastically reduce the income of the upper strata and ensure the state an enormous inflow of money. But would the political determination to implement these laws exist, with the DC still in government? Another loophole is unemployment, much less easy to eliminate in a capitalist economy, on which the PCI has next to nothing to say.

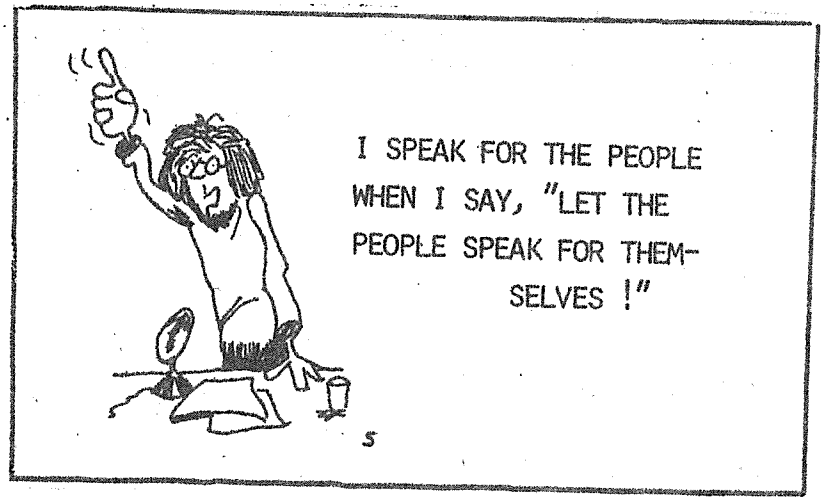
In spite of the weaknesses of its position - uncertainty about support from a strong enough section of the bourgeoisie, and doubts about the feasibility of its economic programme - the PCI was confirmed, in the 1975 elections, as the party of the working class. Its biggest gains were in the heavily industrial areas. Votes for the 'official revolutionary' left, on the contrary, were about the same as in 1972, and mostly middle class, from students and ex-students: the support of the left might however determine whether or not a PCI-PSI Cabinet obtains a majority.

5. THE OFFICIAL LEFT

During the present elections there will be one electoral list, Proletarian Democracy, with candidates from all three main political groups to the left of the PCI:

1) PdUP, founded by ex-PCI and ex-PSI members, which supports the formation of a new social bloc of the left (PCI, PSI, PdUP, and anti-capitalist Catholics);

2) Avanguardia Operaia, ex-trotskyists with strong strands of third-worldism, also favouring a united front of the left;



3) Lotta Continua, more explicitly anti-PCI than the other two, more optimistic about the prospect of a revolution in the not-too-distant future, but sadly confused at the theoretical level, oscillating between entrism into the trade unions and anti-trade-unionism, and from boycotting elections (1970) to "Vote PCI" (1972, 1975) or "Vote for us" (now). Once the biggest of the groups with about 30,000 members, it has declined considerably and now numbers, like the other two, between 10 and 15 thousand militants, four-fifths being students or ex-students.

Common traits of these groups are an incomplete rejection of stalinism (sympathies for China), heavy elements of third-worldism (support for anti-imperialist national struggles), and lack of an alternative strategy to the PCI's. Together with their acceptance of the electoral game, this means that they all act, in effect, as left-wing variants, and thus cover versions, of the PCI line. The most explicit is the PdUP, and especially the ex-PCI 'Manifesto' group, which clearly states that there is no chance of a revolution in the foreseeable future and that the PCI is still the crucial force. The task is therefore, they say, to prevent the PCI from sliding too much to the right.*

6. WORKERS' AUTONOMY

Apart from the above, and from much smaller maoist, leninist and bordighist sects, there is the much more fragmented scene of the non-trad left groups.

As far as I have been able to make out the organised, explicitly libertarian left is very small. The anarchists are no more numerous than in the UK, except for the traditionally anarchist area around Ravenna on the Adriatic, which is economically and politically marginal; and there are no groups with positions similar to those of Solidarity or Social Revolution. The number of explicitly libertarian publications and of bookshops selling them is much smaller than in the UK.

This is only the reflection of the still heavy domination of leninism on the revolutionary left. The trouble is that, with a big Communist Party turning reformist, a large space is created for a critique of the PCI as betrayer of the revolutionary cause, i.e. of leninism (or, for the maoists, of stalinism); the polemic against Bernstein and the 'renegade Kautsky' reappears in new form. Paradoxically, the PCI can then use some correct criticisms of leninism and stalinism as parts of a justification of its own choices, and claim that it is much more Gramscian (communism with a human face, necessity to build first the cultural and institutional hegemony of the working class over the whole of society, etc.) than lenino-stalinist. This makes the task of a critique of leninism much more difficult, and also less central, than it is in Britain.

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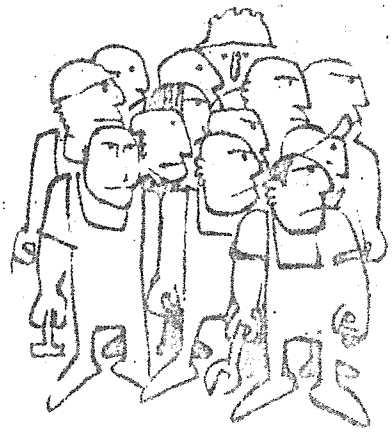
* In Italy, the proportional Representation exists. Very small parties win seats, and there is almost no dispersal of votes.

The type of ideology predominant among people who are instinctively anti-PCI and anti-leninist tends, then, to be a 'workerism' carried to excess: the working class is spontaneously revolutionary; let's struggle in the factories, that's all that's needed; economic struggles are directly political, i.e. revolutionary; the revolution is around the corner; etc. After the first disappointments, as the need to confront bigger problems than those of the single factory become evident, so does the need for organisation. At that point leninism, never explicitly criticised, creeps in and dominates the field again.

This is the way Lotta Continua developed, from a coordination of activists to a centralised organisation , and from a centralised organisation to a party on 'critical leninist' lines - a party which, because it doesn't openly proclaim itself leninist, need not answer any critique of leninism, and is in fact more dominated by the centre and less democratic than, say, IMG in Britain. It is also, unfortunately, the direction apparently being takdn by the so-called 'area of workers' autonomy', i.e. the ensemble of loosely coordinated groups which, since 1972-73, have been criticising all 'official' political groups and their policies of infiltrating the trade unions.

These groups developed rapidly in 1972-73 around a couple of groups of workers in Milan (Alfa Romeo) and Venice (Porto Marghera) who had been part of Potere Operaio (then dissolved). The main tenets of this group had been: a critique of the leninist distinction between political and economic struggles; the political and therefore revolutionary nature of economic struggles; an analysis of such struggles in Italy as expressing a refusal of work, as being against work, thereby rejecting trade-unionism and such slogans as 'Fight for the right to work'.

The workers' groups tried, wherever they were numerous enough, to organise autonomous factory assemblies and to start struggles on problems such as work hazards, pollution, speed-ups and redundancies, on which the TUs refused to intervene. In some factories, e.g. Alfa Romeo, Sit-Siemens, Innocenti, they won their struggles; and in 1973 many more



groups, organised around the emerging 'self-reduction'* struggles in working class neighbourhoods, explicitly declared themselves part of the 'area of workers' autonomy'.

The self-managed reduction of transport fares and electricity and telephone charges spread rapidly from Turin to nearly all areas of heavy industry, and to the proletarian and lumpen-proletarian neighborhoods in large cities throughout Italy. Hundreds of thousands of people participated; neighborhood committees were started in hundreds of places in order to coordinate the struggle, many of them adhering to the principles of 'Workers'Autonomy'. But in many other places, especially in the Turin area, the TUs took over the leadership of the struggle, and finally, in 1974, the State agreed a national package with the unions on cost-of-living allowances, including revised electricity rates and transport fares. In the areas where the unions had controlled the struggle, 'self-reduction' was stopped. In many other areas, especially among the lumpen-proletariat, it has continued, but is now clearly in decline.

The importance of this struggle has been two-fold. On one side, the integration of the TUs into the state apparatus has significantly increased: now they also co-manage decisions in some areas of collective consumption, and they accordingly show more caution and moderation than ever. On the other side, thousands of people, especially housewives, have been politicised by the struggle and have had their first experiences of new popular organisations, the Neighbourhood Committees. It must be added, though, that the latter are now almost everywhere 'official' neighbourhood equivalents of the factory councils, mediating between the neighbourhhod and the local authorities, and are fairly bureaucratised.

It is very difficult to estimate the present strength of 'Workers' Autonomy'. Their papers are not very clear as to how many supporters they have, often from an unconscious fear of appearing weak. My impression is that, since 1974, there have been almost no instances of groups of autonomous workers being able to organise big struggles in factories. The significant exception was not a factory: in Rome University Clinic the presence of many politicised ex-students among the doctors (and the involvement of PCI doctors and of the TUs in the hospital's corruption) ensured 'Workers' Autonomy' a majority at union meetings. Big successes were achieved: over-exploitation

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* 'Self-reduction' means reducing a bill by oneself, i.e. deciding for oneself how much one is going to pay for transport, electricity, etc.

abolished, status of state employees recognised, job security, improvements in the running of the state hospital, etc. The result has been a hysterical campaign against 'Workers' Autonomy' comrades by all the bourgeois press and by the PCI, which has helped to frame some of them (PCI members were among the doctors attacked as corrupt by the autonomous group).

There are small and, at the moment, almost inactive groups of 'autonomous' workers in perhaps thirty factories and about ten neighbourhood committees. In Rome their demonstrations gather around 3000 people, a large number by British standards but not in Italy. Most of them, in a town like Rome, are bound to be students. The groups seem to be evolving towards a greater measure of coordination, but without much clarity.

There are many signs of non-trad-left conciousness. Since 1974, all their papers argue for a struggle to reduce the working week to 35 hours, paid as 40 hours - a proposal I consider very advanced - but so far they don't seem to have persuaded many other workers. Refusal of the delegation principle is common-place. Its clearest expression I found in the following passage, from a Bulletin of the Autonomous Proletarian Committee of Naples Post Office Workers, (March 1975):

'We all know that only struggle allows us to defend our standards of living and to make the consciousness of the masses develop towards the demolition of class society. But in order to struggle effectively it is necessary to be able to get organised and, in fact, the workers, more and more disgusted with the trade unions, turn to the committee to know what to do, what to put in place of the old organisations. They say something like this: "You have demonstrated by struggling that you really defend our interests. Well, from now on you must represent us". This shows how tenacious is the grip of illusions upon workers. It isn't enough to replace 'bad' leaders with honest militants in order to transform the nature of an organisation which for more than 50 years has been integrated into the bosses' state. Any organisation which pretends to 'represent' the workers, deciding in their place, is a trade union, i.e. a cog in the machine, even if it is called a Proletarian Committee of Post Office Workers.

'That's why we propose that the workers in shops where the conditions exist for starting struggles on proletarian objectives, should learn to manage the struggles autonomously by organising in shop committees. But, after what has been said, it must be clear that these committees only exist because there is a struggle going on and, when the struggle is over, they do not pretend to represent anybody. If the vanguards born in the struggle become stable delegates of the workers, then when the ebb comes and the majority of workers take no interest in negotiations over lesser disputes, these delegates necessarily have to substitute themselves for their workmates in order to represent them vis a vis management. So, in the next wave of strikes, instead of stimulating the workers to take upon their own shoulders the weight

of the struggle, they will automatically tend to keep for themselves the roles of leadership and negotiation with the management, independantly of - and even against - the strikers... As the committees become more and more a reality, put into practice by workers in struggle, it will be of fundamental importance to work for their organic connection, because the only guarantee of victory for a struggle is in its extension.

'To spread the struggles, not to represent them or substitute oneself for them - this is the task of revolutionaries'.

Unfortunately, the clarity of this text is exceptional. Usually, the papers and bulletins are simply angry denunciations plus slogans, and the attempts at political and theoretical understanding are marred by heavy language and the persistence of leninist modes of thought. For instance, Rivolta di Classe (Class Revolt), paper of the 'Workers' Autonomy' in Rome, carries the following (in a box under the title):

'This paper is produced by the movement itself; it is the product of the organised struggles of the workers' autonomy in dialectical synthesis with revolutionary theory. Militancy, theory and practice come together in this collective work.

'This is a paper open to contributions from the workers' autonomy interested in the process of national centralisation and, more generally, open to those political forces intent upon a serious and constructive dialogue internal to the practical necessity of building the armed party of the proletariat'.

This language is clearly that of students/intellectuals. In fact, such papers are often run by students rather than by workers. The only attempt I have found to come to grips with the organisational problems, is the intervention of the Milan groups at a recent conference on Organisation(in Rossa, April 24, 1976). I was struck by how close it came to

understanding what is perhaps the crucial weakness of the libertarian left and the reason for its failure to win wider support, not only in Italy. The intervention attempts a critique of the workers' conncils ideology, i.e. the idea that it is possible to run the whole of society through workers' conncils - in their words, 'as a proposal for proletarian and workers' organisation for the dictatorship and the transition to communism'. It argues that the non-homogeneity of social interests, and the complexity of the productive apparatus and of state functions, are too great for direct management by the masses in such a decentralised fashion. It goes on to note that this poses a contradiction, because the only alternative is the (leninist) project of a revolution 'from above', which implies delegation and representation, but the practice of workers' struggles refuses these principles. The contradiction is not solved, nor analysed in greater detail, but an interesting inference is drawn: it is not the single factory, but the state which poses the crucial problems; one way of tackling them is by waging battles for control of public expenditure.

I think that this contradiction is a real one, that it partly explains the continuing appeal of leninism, that not even Solidarity (which has consistently criticised the anarchist tradition of refusing to recognise the problem) has done enough, even theoretically, to overcome it; and we (i.e. all libertarians) should work more on it and on the related problem of why we seem to be unable to overcome it.

Meanwhile, back in Italy... The widespread dissatisfaction with trade unions and the PCI, which was evident in 1968-69, seems to have been prevented, by the economic crisis, from finding wider expression that in small groups of workers and students whose influence seems to have declined further over the past year. According to one ex-militant in Naples Workers' Autonomy (whose analysis was, I think, only slightly over-pessimistic): 'autonomous workers are doing next to nothing in the factories, their papers are produced by students and ex-students, and the only things that still happen are "reappropriations" or "mass political shoppings", i,e. mass depredations of shops, which have increasingly become the activity of young unemployed lumpen-proletarians with next to no political consciousness, using slogans as camouflage'.

Next to nothing is happening in the universities either, and the secondary schools movements have been institutionalised by creating elected representative organs (small school Parliaments). Only the women's movement has kept growing, around the abortion issue - a referendum to legalise abortion, which should have been held this June and was suspended because of the elections, was expected to win about 60% of votes. But it is very fragmented among PCI, bourgeois-radicals, groups attached to the 'official' three parties to the left of the PCI, and independent, more radical groups. Recently, some demonstrations by the latter have been attacked by the police, without 'provocation'; once again, the ruling class does not tolerate non-'official' political expressions.

7. IN CONCLUSION

The economic crisis and the struggles accompanying it seem, on the one hand, to have strengthened those social forces interested in moderate reforms, and to have politicised great masses of people. On the other hand, it seems to have weakened the forces explicitly interested in more fundamental changes, pushing the moderates to even greater moderation and destroying or weakening all political movements with clearly anti-establishment positions, such as the student spear-head groups and 'Workers' Autonomy'. The result is the increased strength of the PCI, and its consequent candidacy as the agent for transforming Italy into a social-democratic, 'modern', capitalist nation.

The weakening of the most radical groups indicates (to me, at least) that it will be some time before an alternative to the proposal for 'modernisation' of Italy emerges. Putting it simply: no historical alternative has concretely counter-posed itself to the choise between capitalist reformism and lenino-stalinism; of these two, the workers choose the first - nobody likes the Russian model any more. Thus the PCI has, for the moment, the 'mandate' of the working class.*

For how long will this mandate last? This depends on two questions: 1) Will the Italian bourgeoisie accept the cooption of the PCI into the running of Italian society? - I think so, but anyway the answer should soon become clear; 2) Can the cooption of the PCI improve the situation enough to avoid the 'disaffection' of the workers? This difficult question would have required a more thorough study of Italy's economic crisis and of the feasibility of various proposals for overcoming it than I had time to make. Flores and Moretti conclude (in New Left Review 96, pp.52-53) that a confrontation between workers and capitalists is inevitable because the latter have no intention of trying the social-democratic/PCI road. However, this seems to me to uner-estimate three factors: 1) the strengthening of the 'left' bourgeoisie and its openings to the PCI; 2) the weakness of radically different (socialist) alternatives, which, - avoiding the leninist voluntarism of Flores and Moretti - must be seen as reflecting a real weakness of the forces wanting a revolution**; 3) the consequent strength of the PCI's control over the workers.

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* There are analogies with the effect of the crisis on the British working class. This should be the object of discussion: does the economic crisis weaken the non-trad. left? And if it does, why?

** This weakness, a factor not limited to Italy, should also be the object of serious discussion.

Nevertheless, the evolution of the Italian situation into a confrontation is not precluded. The bourgeoisie might categorically refuse to coopt the PCI, or an international boycott engineered by the USA might bring havoc to the economy, and in the subsequent unrest and polarisation anything could happen. Workers might go on strike and occupy factories on a bigger scale than in 1969; some frightened capitalists might flee abroad, leaving the factories without management and compelling the workers to take them over... A well-known social dynamic could then be established, which would in all likelihood culminate in a clash. On the outcome of the latter, I would be pessimistic. The forces interested in radical transformation of Italy do not seem to me strong enough to beat both the internal and the international enemies.

Whether pessimism is a good enough excuse for revolutionaries to stay out of the struggle is another problem - I would say not (after all, there might be a new May '68 in France in support of an Italian revolution, etc....). But illusions are dangerous. I don't think, however, that this choice will pose itself in Italy, at least in the coming two or three years, unless forced upon it by a conscious decision of some foreign power to obstruct Italy's capitalist modernisation. An attempt at this modernisation, which will wil sufficient popular support, remains for me the most probable alternative.

In this situation, the task of small radical groups will be made very difficult by the particular concern to crush the extreme left which always arises when some difficult reform is to be attempted - a preoccupation well in the minds of the PCI, as the episodes at Rome University Clinic show. A further illustration: the PCI did very little to prevent the passing of a law giving the police wider powers to shoot, which is considered t · have been responsible for the killing of sixty people, mostly left-wing, in the fifteen months since it was passed. The level of political violence is fairly high, a (welcome?) shock to people coming from Britain - and seems to be rising. It won't be all roses, then, for revolutionary tourists who choose Italy.

But Italy poses questions for all libertarians, questions which are, indeed, not new. They are, fundamentally: 'Why do we remain so few?' and 'What can we do to change this situation?'

What about a debate on these questions?

THELEME ANARRES

review: SPAIN 1936: PRACTICAL EXAMPLE OR THEORETICAL LESSON?

The Anarchist Collectives: Workers' Self-Management in the Spanish Revolution, 1936-39. Edited by Sam Dolgoff with an Introductory Essay by Murray Bookchin. Free Life Editions, New York, 1974. 235pp. $3.45 (paperback)

Collectives in the Spanish Revolution by Gaston Leval. Translated with Foreward by Vernon Richards. Freedom Press, 1975. 368 pp. £2.00 (paperback), £4.00 (cloth).

The current upsurge of interest in Spain may be occasioned as much by recent events as by the memories of the past, but there is no doubt that what happened there nearly forty years ago still looms large in the minds of libertarians. These two books provide a lot of useful material for those who seek to disentangle strands of reality from the various myths.

Both are concerned with the experience of the Collectives, the constructive work of the Spanish Revolution which has been obscured and ignored for years by orthodox academics and the Stalinist left. Libertarians, on the other hand, have come to regard the Collectives as a high point of self-activity of ordinary people, vindicating their social theories. Most would agree that the experience was highly significant and makes a compelling claim on our attention. But we do not therefore have to suspend criticism, or evade the problems posed by a closer study of the subject.

Sam Dolgoff's book includes excerpts from some of the best known and best informed writings on the Collectives, some of which were not readily available in English, linked by several background articles by Dolgoff, and supplied with a Glossary, Bibliography and Index as well as some illustrations. The introductory essay by Murray Bookchin, in the process of getting some sort of overall perspective on events, comes up with one or two interesting ideas, providing food for thought but not to be swallowed whole. For Bookchin, this is the last of the great proletarian revolutions, climax to the 'classical era of proletarian socialism', 1848-1939. He sees the strong rural influence as positive, fertilising the revolutionary elan of the Barcelona proletariat as in the cases of Paris and Petrograd earlier; libertarian organisational forms fit into this picture as allegedly enabling a synthesis of the pre-capitalist traditions of the village with an industrial economy and highly urbanised society. The more negative and unlibertarian traditions of village life (e.g. sexism, xenophobia) are not emphasised.

One obvious question that arises early on is that of the anarchist participation in government, how and why it was allowed to happen. It now seems to be generally accepted by anarchists that there is a case to be answer on this issue: their comments vary from harsh honesty (as in Vernon Richards' Lessons of the Spanish Revolution, Freedom Press, 1972) to defens-

iveness. Bookchin points to the 'fatal coupling' of the CNT (National Federation of Labour - syndicalist) with the FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation) which meant that the 'theoretical giants' of the latter could claim to speak for hundreds of thousands. Even before 1936, regular and close communication between workers and influential militants was tending to break down; there was confusion about the locus of policy decisions, which were not always firmly in the hands of the rank and file. Dolgoff confirms (p.35) that the first open congress of the CNT, with 600,000 represented, was also the last until 1936. It is in any case doubtful whether direct democracy could function in a body of such a size without careful planning of its mechanism.

In an excerpt from Ni Franco, Ni Stalin (pp.50-61) we find Leval too discussing the decision to join the Government, and weighing up the alternatives. Even in Barcelona, in his opinion, public support for the anarchists was limited to a vague gratitude. Any attempts to impose 'anarchist dictatorship' (his phrase, p.53) would have made it 'extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible, to make the social revolution'. This illustration of the anarchists' self-concious identity as a group, thinking in terms of their control, power, influence, shows how their movement had become in some respects a quasi-party with its own organisational loyalty.

Not that Leval is totally uncritical. He admits (p.60) that most comrades (sic) in official positions came to see problems from the state angle. He adds, however, that even if the collaboration was accepted (post factum) by the plenum of the CNT, the rank and file CNT-FAI still worked for the revolution. It is with the rank and file/grass roots activity that the first-hand accounts reprinted by Dolgoff are primarily concerned. Peirats, Souchy, Kaminski, as well as Leval supply details of the organisation by the Spanish people of sectors of industry and the economy, in towns and in the countryside. Throughout the emphasis is on practicalities - day-to-day problems and how they were dealt with. Theory comes over as having been vague and general, inspirational rather than analytical or critical.

Of course, details of how the Collectives functioned are a valid field of study, relevant to the project of a self-managed society. The effort to prevent bureaucracy from developing and to maximise direct democracy is still a necessary preoccupation. The situation in Spain, however, was a long way from constituting a fully self-managed society, a fact recognised by most commentators and underlined by descriptions of the various expedients adopted by even the most thorough-going collectivists. Incidentally, this book observes the distinction between worker's control and workers' self-management; workers' control was sometimes introduced as a transitional stage before expropriation.

Despite the limitations and uneven spread of the revolution, it is claimed that 'the goal toward which the workers were striving was clear enough'. This implies that there existed, on a mass scale, not only a determination collectively to resist oppression but also a shared idea of the kind of society to work for. The material on the Collectives indicates that some such vision could be powerfully present, however vague in detail and inconsistent in practical attempts at realisation. But however deeply we are impressed by this we need not expect it to provide a blueprint for our situation now.

In his conclusion, Dolgoff emphasises the significance of the 'popular consciousness' of the Spanish Revolution, and 'the application of the fundamental constructive principles of anarchism or free socialism to the immediate practical problems of the Spanish social revolution'. This accentuation of the positive to the point of almost eliminating the negative is typical of the production as a whole. It can be equally instructive to ask where the Collectives fell short of their own ideals, when self-management was not extended equally to all members and why it stopped short of certain areas of life.(1) We are entitled to enquire too whether their ideals equipped them for the confrontation with the authoritarian left or, on the other hand, blurred their responses by being so very idealistic.

Leval's magnum opus similarly concentrates on the positive achievements of the Collectives, aiming to provide a record of their constructive work. Many of the themes of the Dolgoff collection recur, in a painstaking compilation of information. The bulk of the book takes the form of a rather repetitive catalogue of the course taken by events in a large number of places; we are given topographical description, background, reaction to the attempted nationalist uprising and partial breakdown of government, arrangements made for collectivisation, and the evntual fate of each community at the hands of fascists or Republicans. It is not very easy to read straight through it, but it can readily provide an impression of the Collectives in general or information on specific points. An Index would have been useful; as it is the reader may have to plough through a lot of pages to find relevant examples, although the breakdown of material under various headings - agrarian socialisation,

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(1) See Solidarity Pamphlet No.48, Women in the Spanish Revolution.

industry and public services, towns and isolated achievements, etc. - offers some signposts for researchers.

In his preamble Leval discusses the political background of libertarianism in Spain, tracing it back to Bakunin's Alliance, and alluding to the early Christians and to various peasant revolts whose aims he sees as having been achieved in the Spanish Revolution. This idealistic view is reinforced by the high-flown claim that the libertarian morality of complete solidarity found expression in the Collectives of 1936-39 - Leval does not add the qualification "imperfectly" despite his own cataloguing of numerous imperfections and occasional explicit recognition of them. He quotes a militant as saying that the Collectives were 'not the integral application of libertarian communism', a point made in the Introduction by Vernon Richards, who describes the 'community of work' and the lack of any attempt to alter existing family patterns or encourage communal living.

The work ethic was undeniably strong - Richards refers to the declaration of the Spanish Internationalists' Manifesto of 1872 that 'work is the basis on which society rests' - and was reinforced by the feeling of commitment to the Collectives. But the effects of collectivisation were not confined to peoples working lives. Scattered throughout the book are many fascinating glimpses of social customs. Leval suggests in a note on page 167 that though individuals lived at home, privatisation was not excessive as there was constant communising. Elsewhere (p.193, note) he goes so far as to suggest there was an instant revolutionary change in customs: 'What Spanish male would have previously done the shopping at the grocer's and also bought a little girl's shoes?'

There are, however, rather more instances of the Collective exercising pressures to conformity and perpetuating traditional ideas of the patriarchal family and division of labour between the sexes. This may not be surprising in the context of a predominately peasant society, but it is an instance of the gap between the consciousness of Spanish libertarians in the thirties and what we would now expect as a pre-requisite for revolutionary change. It is not a question of saying what we think the Spanish collectivists should have done, but of being clear about what they actually did and how we now necessarily differ from them.

The message that emerges from a study of the Collectives is far from being entirely negative. We may criticise them constructively and resolve to avoid some mistakes by developing our own vision, both of the sort of society we want and of how to defend it - against the authoritarian left as well as against the right. But the experience of Spain remains as a prime example of what could be achieved by ordinary people consciously taking control of their lives. It is good that more books about it are becoming available.

L.W.

review

The Angry Brigade by Gordon Carr, Gollancz, 207pp.

This book which claims to offer a detailed history of 'Britain's first urban guerilla group' is vastly superior to some of the fantasies that appeared in the national press after the trial. However it is still less than comprehensive. For instance, there is no mention of the bombings claimed by the Angry Brigade which occurred after the arrest of those accused of being responsible. There is no mention of various other trials that took place after the main Angry Brigade trial and which the prosecutions suggested were in some way connected. The whole issue of the numerous police raids where, according to their victims, totally irrelevant material was seized is likewise skated over.

There are more serious factual errors. A meeting which Gordon Carr considers to have been important to the development of the Angry Brigade is stated on different pages to have occurred in both 1969 and in 1970. Jake Prescott is stated to have been accused of the bombing at the house of John Davis MP, which did not occur until Jake had been in prison for some time. Although these are probably only slips of the pen they are unfortunate since they do not encourage total confidence in those parts of the story that are undocumented (and therefore must be taken on trust.)

Gordon Carr is a crime reporter rather than a political writer. He nevertheless makes an honest attempt to describe the politics behind the Angry Brigade. Unfortunately the result is unbalanced. Thus the French General Strike of May 1968 is described in superfluous detail but there is very little about more relevant events in Britain, such as the rise and decline of the Vietnam movement, the politicisation of the Underground and its press. The result, no doubt unintentional, is to reinforce the Fleet Street stereotypes in which any radical activity is always a foreign import.

The most serious failure of political analysis is the way in which the Brigade and its supporters are simply described as 'the libertarians' without any attempt to define the word. Since the term is used by a large number of people of widely differing views (including, for example, the late Ross Mc Whirter) it means very little and results in Carr making some ridiculous statements (e.g. that the whole libertarian movement is obsessed by class struggle). In any case many of the implications of the Brigade's politics were far from libertarian. The general idea, as far as can be gathered, seems to have been that the bombings would spark off similar acts by others, culminating in a general insurrection. The working class, according to the Brigades communiques, was already revolutionary: 'more and more workers... are transforming trade union consciousness into political militancy. In one week one million workers were on strike.' They were apparently only held back by reformist leaders: 'The CP union leaders... always sell us out.' The resemblance of this whole outlook to that of the WRP is obvious. Although it leads in one

case to campaigns 'to build the correct leadership' and in the other case to spectacular acts to trigger off immediate revolution, what both have in common is the belief that industrial and other struggles are automatically revolutionary, irrespective of the consciousness of those involved in them. This denies people the ability to decide for themselves whether they will struggle for revolutionary, reformist or even reactionary ends. Thus Brigade communiques condemned 'imperialism' in Ireland but not the futility of 'national liberation' and seriously saw as meaningful revolutionary activity 'hundreds of threatening phone calls to government bosses.'

The sterility of orthodox Trotskyism has revealed the futility of attempting to work for social change by the creation of cardres of 'correct' leaders. The futility of working for social change with small groups of urban guerillas is revealed by groups like the Symbionese Liberation Army and the German Red Army Fraction, with their grotesque parodies of military ranks and discipline and their unelected and non-revocable 'people's tribunals' handing down death sentences in the best Stalinist manner. The real solution is more difficult, more time consuming but will be infinitely more worth while.

Roger S.

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