

Wildcat

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LONG HOT SUMMER 1990



**WE'RE NOT
PAYING THE
POLL TAX**

VICTORY AT TRAFALGAR SQUARE

Trafalgar Square will go down in history. It was the most politically conscious and effective riot of modern times. A passive demonstration organised by the left was transformed into the biggest explosion of class war in Central London since the "unemployed riots" of 1886. Everyone who took part feels an immense sense of pride, not just in the immediate results:

- a deepening of the political crisis in the British ruling class
- a growing mood of uncertainty about the possibility of implementing the poll tax among all factions of the state apparatus
- a massive blow to the myth of Britain as a haven of class peace, seen by thousands of tourists and live on TV by millions throughout the Western world
- the first direct experience of class violence on the part of some of the rich parasites who infest Central London
- the battering received by the police, to the accompaniment of a barrage of abuse from a large crowd of demonstrators
- a clear demarcation between the small but growing minority of class conscious working class people and the left wing of capitalism,

but also in the long term lessons. No matter how well-trained the police are, it is possible for a large angry mob to force them to retreat. A growing number of people hate them intensely. "There was a crowd of about 1000 people around us, some wearing masks... I don't think they would have worried too much about killing us", reported Sgt. Paul Irvine, who was trapped in a van besieged by rioters with scaffold poles. Obviously, they are not going to take this sort of treatment lying down (apart from when they're actually unconscious). The wave of arrests following March 31 has helped the anti-poll tax movement achieve a belated sense of security. People will now be more careful what they say on the phone and in public. The willing assistance of the media in providing the police with films and photos means that cameramen will always be among the first targets of future violent protests. It also means people will COVER THEIR FACES in riot situations.

What now? The most important form of struggle is the campaign of non-payment of the poll tax, the undramatic work of maintaining the confidence of non-payers, the work of leafletting, organising rallies, demos, poll tax bonfires, attempting to link resistance to the workplace struggle, and so on. But out of the numerous arenas of confrontation between the state and its victims: magistrates courts, council meetings, bailiffs visits (if they dare go ahead with them), pickets of workplaces where wages are being deducted for poll tax arrears, pickets of council buildings where the tax is being



Seven trapped riot cops were injured when the mob attacked

implemented, and any large gathering of working class people, major flare-ups could easily arise. The defence of class war prisoners is a crucial task of anti-poll tax groups. The police will want to send people away for a long time.

There is no doubt that the riot was to some extent provoked by the police. They attacked protesters sitting in the road outside Downing St.. As riot police charged down Whitehall, they were followed by a small group of rioters armed with sticks and stones. But the main riot developed because ten thousand people wanted to get the police, saw their chance, and took it. The reason is that they hate them. Apart from obvious examples of police brutality like the Guildford 4 case or the Hillsborough tragedy, the daily role of the police is to enforce poverty, to keep the working class from getting its hands on the products of its labour. The rioters were not mindless hooligans. They were mainly very clear about why and who they were fighting. They were disciplined, responsible and class conscious. A couple of racists said "Let's get the Paki bastard", referring to a shopkeeper. The rest of the rioters immediately dealt with these unwanted intruders by kicking shit out of them. It wasn't just anarchists and squatters. There were all sorts of people involved from building workers to gangs of youths out for a day's looting. This was the working class on the rampage.

The police were the main target. They were attacked with impressive courage and brutality. One man ran in front of the police horses, pulled a pig onto the floor, and ran back into the crowd. As the demonstrators retreated up Charing Cross Rd., other targets were identified. Big cars were burnt, banks and shop windows were smashed, and music shops were looted. Film crews were attacked and had their cameras smashed. Gradually the police pushed the demonstrators into the side streets. This merely spread the rioting over a wide area of the West End. Numerous gangs departed from the main demo, intent on wrecking symbols of wealth. The main body of rioters continued through Leicester Square and Piccadilly into Regents Street, smashing and burning, all the time shouting "No Poll Tax", supported by shoppers on the buses.

The immediate aim of the riot has the support of the majority of the working class. The more long term aims of the rioters are still the views of a minority. The rioters wanted, literally, to smash the bourgeoisie. Rich bastards who tried to defend their Mercedes were acquainted with the pavement. For the first time in living memory, the rich were given a small taste of what their rule depends on: class violence. There are millions who would like to have a go.

The impunity with which most of the rioters were able to loot, burn, smash and occasion actual bodily harm has given a great boost of confidence to the undemocratic hooligan minority.

THE ENEMY WITHIN

The Thatcher phenomenon was part of a world-wide return to right wing economic policies by the bourgeoisie, following the realisation that the paternalistic social democratic approach of the post-war period had failed to solve the economic crisis and crush the working class. There had been an international wave of class struggle from May '68 in France to the downfall of the Tory government in Britain in '74 in the wake of a mass strike. When the Labour government in turn failed to control the proletariat, the bourgeoisie decided on a different approach.

The emasculation of the unions by severely limiting their ability to call strikes obviously had its dangers - there was a possibility of wildcat strikes breaking out and workers rejecting the unions. But as it turned out, this aspect of the bourgeoisie's strategy worked. As the unions were forced to blatantly sabotage strikes, workers generally let them get away with it. Sector after sector fought stage-managed confrontations, with no attempts to spread the strike. The possibilities of united strike action were squandered by workers who simply failed to learn from sectoral defeat.

"THESE PEOPLE ARE TOTALLY AGAINST DEMOCRACY" - THATCHER TOO FUCKING RIGHT!

The poll tax is an attempt by the ruling class to cut the social wage - that part of our income which we receive regardless of how much work we do. The bourgeoisie wants to strengthen the obligation for us to find work, however low the pay or lousy the conditions, and to work harder if we've already got jobs.

When it was first announced, it was touted as a way of bringing high-spending left wing councils to their senses. Many sections of the working class outside the inner cities expected to be better off than under the old rates system.

Now, the size of poll tax demands has shocked and angered millions of people. Even in low-spending local authority areas like Surrey, 66% of two-adult houses are worse off under the new system of funding local government. In boroughs with large social services bills, the poll tax is £500 or more. In the Tory heartlands of the South, there are villages with a 66% non-payment rate. The violent protests which greeted the introduction of the tax threw the government and the currency into turmoil. But more serious is the realisation that a mass campaign of non-payment involving millions of people, most of them with no previous political involvement, many of them ex-Tory voters, might succeed. The March riots in England made it clear, for the first time, how widespread and deeply-felt hostility to the tax on the poor is. For the first time, it became clear that mass,

after sectoral defeat. The miners' strike was planned in advance by the Tories, and was a victory for the bosses. The NUM kept control, and the bosses got the thousands of redundancies they wanted. But there was a price to pay for the Thatcher approach to industrial relations and to social relations in general. By letting market forces rip, she forced millions into poverty, creating growing class anger. This was most clearly shown during the riots of 1981 throughout England. During the miners' strike as well, class violence became more respectable as communities defended themselves against the pigs. In most of the big class battles of this century, there had been relatively little violence. The Conservatives have begun to undo 80 years of social democracy, recreating a minority of class-conscious criminals who like nothing better than to spend a sunny Saturday bruising and battering the boys in blue. The heroic uprisings in the prisons which started the day after Trafalgar Square also added to the bosses' crisis and helped set the tone.

After a decade of picking off sections, the bosses are forced to attack virtually the whole working class at once. The poll tax is the flagship of this attack: 73% of adults in England and Wales will be worse off under the poll tax than under the rates. Among working class adults, the figure is nearer to 90%. Although there has not yet been a class-wide response, the actions of a militant minority have thrown the bourgeoisie into crisis. The Tories' flagship is sinking under the biggest wave of class anger for at least 16 years.

organised refusal to pay can win.

As the poll tax demands drop through letter boxes along with mortgage reminders and council rent increases, millions of working class people are realising that they can't pay.

Most people in Britain are sinking into debt. Hundreds of thousands of households are behind with their mortgage repayments, council rents have just gone up, credit cards are burning deeper and deeper holes in working class pockets. The fight against the poll tax can become the beginning of a fight against debt in general. Any demand for money from capitalist firms or from the government, for whatever reason, is an attack on the living standards of the working class, and we must learn how to resist collectively the banks and building societies as well as our traditional enemies, the slum landlords of local government.

BOLLAX TO THE POLL TAX

Resistance to the tax in Scotland (where it was introduced a year earlier than the rest of Britain) has shown the way. The scale of non-payment is much higher than forecast. Council leaders have bluntly told the government that their authorities will face a financial crisis later this year if non-payment remains at 20%.

According to official figures, 850,000 Scots have either not paid the tax, or are well behind. They said in early April that there had been no significant change since January. The legendary resilience of the Scots is not being worn down. Strathclyde summonsed 352,745 tax defaulters in March. Lothian Regional Council has sent 98,000 final notices to non-payers. There are 79,000 people who are three or more months in arrears. This makes a grand total of 35% of the adult population of Lothian. Leaked figures from Strathclyde, Scotland's biggest administrative region, show that on 7 March, 42.5% of the adults in Glasgow had paid nothing or were in serious arrears. The leader of Glasgow District Council summed it up when she said "The people trying to make the system work are tearing their hair out".

In so far as the resistance has been consciously organised it has been carried out by hundreds of local anti-poll tax groups across Scotland. These groups have encouraged non-registration and non-payment by door to door canvassing, leaflet distribution, public meetings, demonstrations and pickets of council offices. More recently, there has been physical resistance to bailiffs who have been sent out to seize people's possessions or to assess their value prior to seizure. Hundreds of demonstrators wait for the bailiffs, who sometimes don't show up at all. Scottish activists have organised flying pickets with CB radios called "scumbusters" to coordinate resistance to the bailiffs. Lothian poll tax staff are taking self-defence classes against a growing threat of violent attacks.

The seizure of personal possessions is politically disastrous for the councils. The Financial Times says that attachment of earnings is also an administrative nightmare. A large firm has employees from dozens of local councils, with different tax rates. The suppliers of payroll software, which needs to be rewritten to calculate poll tax deductions, say the government have given them no information. This means a lot of work for any employer who tries to deduct earnings. (Computer Weekly 22 Feb 90). It's worth putting them through the hassle of doing this, and using it to create conflict between employers and employees. These sort of administrative problems will not in themselves make the poll tax unenforceable, but they are problems which the working class can take advantage of.

Poll tax resistance is throwing local government into crisis. Millions will refuse or be unable to pay, meaning poll tax increases for the remainder. They in turn will refuse to pay. Local government services will collapse, forcing people to find ways of organising their own lives.

Councils blatantly made up figures concerning the level of registration. Population figures based on the last census are hopelessly out of date - enabling Westminster Council to claim a registration figure of over 150%! In desperation, many councils adopted a policy of putting all rate payers and council tenants on the register whether they'd filled in a form or not, resulting in registers with an enormous number of incorrect entries.

Panicked by the scale of opposition, the government are carrying out an expensive public

relations exercise designed to demoralise and isolate poll tax resisters. Immediately after Trafalgar Square, they tried to stir up a campaign against resisters, but failed completely. Even a public opinion poll showed a surprising amount of support for the riot. In Scotland, the local councils initially said that the vast majority had registered, to try to make people think that resistance is useless. The truth has now emerged: hundreds of thousands have made no contribution to the tax in over a year. If anything, resistance is growing.

A POLL tax assistant hanged himself rather than face one more day of abuse from an irate public.

Kind-hearted Fred True-man, 52, was deeply upset by the hostility he met as he chased up those who had failed to complete registration forms.

There were constant insults and threats from people opposed to the controversial tax.

He had only one more day of house calls to go. But instead he went home and hanged himself from a beam

INSULTS DRIVE POLL TAX MAN TO SUICIDE

Lothian intended the self-defence classes for social workers, but now wants to extend them to poll tax officials. Tony Martin, the council's head of personnel, said he would report all incidents to the police. "We may have had disgruntled ratepayers in the past, but the level of violence in this last year has been quite appalling," he said. The plan is being put to union representatives.

One of the commonest fears people have is the idea of a well-organised, monolithic state chasing every individual in the country. "They" have everybody's name on computer. So they do-but coordinating the numerous records on which people's details are kept is not easy. 25% of the population of big cities moves every year. For a minority, it is possible to dodge the poll tax. Many have dropped off the electoral register. But for most people, only mass resistance will suffice.

The magistrate's courts are not equipped to deal with hundreds of thousands of extra cases. Local government officials are expected to play a policing role, for which they have little enthusiasm or training. Hackney has been allocated one day in court per year to enforce the tax: even before the March riots, they estimated they'd need 366.

Most of the parliamentary parties have condemned resistance to the poll tax because it's against the law, and obviously, they are against people dropping off the electoral register. The Scottish National Party, the self-styled "Party of non-payment", has councillors in Argyll and Angus who are enthusiastically sending in the bailiffs against non-payers.

The Labour Party's poll tax spokesman, David Blunkett, has always condemned non-payment and has boasted that Labour councils have achieved high levels of registration: telling lies on behalf of the government. Peter Shaw of Labour's leadership made it clear that an incoming Labour government will pursue defaulters. Bryan Gould, the shadow environment secretary said "We say pay the bill. However difficult and unpleasant and objectionable it may be, the way to fight the poll tax is at the ballot box". The Labour Party leadership condemned the work of "hooligans and troublemakers". Echoes of Tiananmen Square. Roy Hattersley opined "The people of this country want a united front from all the democratic parties against the enemies of democracy. If there is a small group of people trying to

undermine democracy in this country, they have to be exposed." And Militant has boasted it will grass up resisters to the police. Never has it been clearer that all factions of the Labour Party are part of the class enemy.

These scum are unclear about what they will do about the poll tax if they get elected. But central to their current thinking is that the market value of a person's home, whether it is mortgaged or rented, will form the basis of the bill. In other words, poor people in the cities, who pay extortionate rent, will be hammered just as they are under the poll tax. Labour proposes to tax individuals, rather than households, so overcrowded households will pay more: just like the poll tax. There is no point in replacing the Tories with Labour. In fact this would be a defeat for the class struggle, because people would think the battle was won. The thing is to make the poll tax unworkable, and force whichever government is in power to withdraw it.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT:

THATCHER'S POLL TAX POLICE

Local councillors are Thatcher's poll tax police. Whatever they say, whatever party they belong to, their position as local government officials means they must impose the law of the land on the working class, as Lambeth's leader Joan Twelves admitted when she said officials have a legal duty to collect the tax, at the same time as announcing the recruitment of 1,000 more officials. (South London Press, 12 May 89).

Brighton's Labour council was ahead of all the Sussex Tory councils in taking people to court for non-registration. At a meeting in February, one Labour councillor complained how the poll tax was:

"...turning local government into the torturers of local people, the snoopers, it's turning people against the council".

This was supposed to be a criticism of the tax.

Lambeth council said they weren't going to buy the computer needed to implement the tax. But then their finance officer Peter Maxted warned that all delays in buying the £2 million machine would be illegal. So they bought it. But what about the few left-wing councillors who refuse to cooperate in implementing the tax? At best, they are spreading the illusion that local government can be something other than part of the state, part of the system which oppresses and exploits the working class, that it can be reformed by well-meaning individuals. If they really wanted to fight the tax, they would resign. It is significant that the first councillors to resign over the poll tax were the 18 West Oxfordshire Tories who resigned the party whip. Most councillors will need to feel the lash of class violence to make them resign, like the 4 Haringey Labour councillors forced out by an angry mob on March 9th.

However, many anti-poll tax groups are closely connected with Labour councillors. Breaking with these hacks is not just a question of organisational remedies. It is a question of fighting the politics of Labourism which holds back the working class in every struggle, and from which the anti-poll tax movement is beginning to break. For this reason we strongly

disagree with the Anarchist Communist Federation when they say, in their paper Organise! 17 :

"As for organisation, we should argue that the power in local anti-poll tax groups is held at street level, and that mandated delegates from small local groups make decisions for the area campaign. Leaving power with an open meeting of 'activists' - answerable to no-one except themselves - is wide open to manipulation. Left parties can easily arrange to 'pack out' the meeting on a given night and swing the vote their way."

It is a fact of life that the class struggle is organised by what are, from the point of view of democratic niceties, "open meetings of activists". The question for revolutionaries is how to encourage more people to become activists. The problem is not that lefties can pack out meetings and swing votes. What is to stop them doing the same at the "base committee" meetings proposed by the ACF? The left understand only too well that democracy is perfectly compatible with a minority dictatorship. In any case, this is not the main problem here. Militant have taken over existing groups but a more common tactic was to create pseudo-groups of their own which often only existed on paper. In this way they set up their own "Federations" and "Steering Committees" run by Militant full timers and claim to be the "sole representative voice" of the anti-poll tax movement. Certainly we have to denounce these manoeuvres but it is a waste of time trying to set up "truly representative" federations. Given the strength which social democracy still enjoys within the working class, and the dispersed nature of the revolutionary forces, it is virtually inevitable that any nation-wide organisation of struggle groups will be dominated by supporters of capitalism. This does not mean that it is impossible to coordinate struggles. It means that this coordination has to be built up by developing direct links of solidarity between existing worthwhile groups - that is, groups which already have a fairly hard practical critique of the Labour Party and its hangers-on. There are quite a few of these groups about. Militant's policy of naming names has opened people's eyes. When a "Community Resistance" speaker denounced the Labour Party and the local council as "capitalist bastards", at the lobby of Brixton Town Hall on 9 March, this was well received by many of the assembled mob. The Labour supporters who organised the lobby called for people to peacefully disperse. It didn't work.

WHAT WE NEED TO DO

Anti-poll tax groups need to mobilise resistance to the tax into active sabotage through demos, propaganda, resistance to bailiffs, disruption of council meetings and magistrate's courts, forcing councillors to resign or not to prosecute, workplace go-slows, strikes, destroying and losing software and paperwork, etc.. Legal advice is also an integral part of anti-tax activity. All forms of resistance, legal, illegal, collective and individual should be used. Only those tactics which actually support the enemy - like petitions - should be rejected. Leicestershire

council has admitted that a petition is being used to trace non-payers. Regular house-to-house leafletting, giving details of the numbers not paying, the problems of collecting it, how to join local anti-poll tax groups, etc., is more important now than ever to counteract the lies of the media. Now it is clear how much anger there is against the tax, the central area of resistance is non-payment. Millions realise that if they simply refuse to pay, the government will have great difficulty doing anything about it. All kinds of tactics will be used to try to isolate and intimidate non-payers. The most important task of anti-poll tax groups is to support people against the councils and courts, to maintain solidarity. This will be much easier than we expected, now that we can convincingly argue that non-payment can win, but still means consistent hard work in the months ahead.

As we write, there have been no successful sales of people's property nor attachment of earnings in Scotland, a year after the tax came in. Non-payment is not a criminal offence. It is a civil matter. The council has to pursue poll tax debt (including penalties incurred for non-registration) through a complex legal process, just like pursuing any other debt. After the council has decided it's worth their while and not too politically embarrassing to pursue you, and after it has tried

1. Attachment of earnings,
2. deduction of benefit and
3. sending in the bailiffs,

and still has not recovered the money due, the law states that it may apply to the magistrates' court to send you to jail. Councils are not obliged to pursue non-payers, and it can be made politically unacceptable for them to do so. The court would have to be satisfied of "wilful refusal or culpable neglect" on your part. The maximum sentence is three months.

On the workplace side of the struggle there is much to do. The nationwide pay strike by white-collar council workers in August last year was not directly to do with the poll tax but did disrupt its implementation. It included workers in poll tax offices and finance departments (resulting in cash-flow problems for the councils). Some workers are refusing to implement the tax, a few workers in Edinburgh have struck against it, and some factories have been the starting point for demonstrations. Housing benefit workers in Haringey are boycotting the tax, and housing council workers in Sheffield are refusing to do poll tax work, which means none can be collected. Social security workers in South London refused to hand over claimants' details. Nurses in London have occupied their employers' offices to force them not to deduct the poll tax from wages or add it to rents. Encouragingly, when Hackney Council suspended an anarchist employee for supporting class violence on TV, his fellow workers immediately walked out.

Clearly there need to be direct links between community groups and militant workers. The most important way in which this can happen is for workers to join community based anti-poll tax groups if their home and work are not too far apart. There is also a need to set up workplace based groups where this is possible, particularly amongst council workers. For council workers the poll tax will not just hit

them as residents, it will also mean mass redundancies as services are cut and an intensification of work when rates departments are re-organised into poll tax departments. Links with groups outside the work-place could provide a means by which the unions' stranglehold on workers' struggles can be undermined, enabling links to be made between different work-places outside of union control. We need to encourage an attitude of complete "non-collaboration" towards local government. That is - support for anything which starves councils of money (particularly non-payment of rent as well as poll tax), the disruption of council meetings, a policy of "no platform" for councillors wherever they try to speak, getting as many people as possible off the electoral register and encouraging the boycott of council elections ("Don't Vote for the Poll Tax!").

THE FUTURE...

The struggle against the poll tax is just the beginning. We are learning useful lessons about how to fight the bosses in other areas, how to organise mass non-payment and defend each other from bailiffs and snoopers. This could be enormously valuable in future struggles to repudiate working class debt - rent, mortgages, credit cards... We can also learn about ways of forging links between work-place and community struggles.

The open adoption of free market policies across almost the entire world has meant that the traditional claim of social democrats to be protectors of the working class against market irrationalities is no longer credible. In Western Europe cuts in all forms of welfare spending have meant that all sections of the state have taken on a more blatantly repressive role. In Britain local government has been



brought increasingly under central government control with an ever declining budget, resulting in "municipal socialists" looking more and more ridiculous as they implement cuts in jobs and services whilst claiming to "fight the Tories". These traditional recuperators of the class struggle are being forced harder and harder against the wall as the peasants grow more revolting by the day.

Reliable information about the anti-poll tax struggle in Scotland can be found in the following publications:

Refuse and Resist, 2/3, 182 Ark Lane, Glasgow G31 2JS, and Counter Information, Pigeonhole CI, c/o 11 Forth St., Edinburgh. Both are free news sheets. Send a donation.

More useful information about the legal position on non-payment can be obtained from: Poll Tax Legal Group, PO Box 1335, London N16 6YR.

HERMAN GORTER'S OPEN LETTER TO COMRADE LENIN - ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

We have recently published Herman Gorter's 1920 Open Letter to Comrade Lenin. This is the first time it has been published in English for 70 years.

Within the Communist International, or Comintern, in its first few years, there were genuinely revolutionary tendencies. Gorter's tendency, the Communist Workers Party (KAPD), tried initially to prevent the Comintern turning into another social democratic institution, dedicated to the preservation of capitalism. At the time, this damage limitation exercise seemed quite feasible.

The KAPD was formed in April 1920. The "Left Communists" who founded the KAPD had been instrumental in setting up the German Communist Party (KPD) in January 1919. The majority of participants in the founding congress were against both participation in parliament and the trade unions. This was a result of their experience of how the parliamentary orientation of the Social Democratic party had corrupted the working class, giving it faith that socialism could be delivered from above, and of how the trade unions had actively helped the war effort. But the followers of Rosa Luxemburg, or Spartacists, argued that the trade unions could be revolutionised, and only reluctantly adopted an anti-parliamentary platform. The Left Communist majority allowed the Spartacists to join, and left these crucial differences of opinion unresolved. They also allowed them to take over the Central Committee, a power base from which they were shortly able to attack the Left.

The initial phase of the German Revolution was crushed by the Social Democratic government, with the aid of loyal workers and the proto-Nazi armed groups, the Freikorps. In spite of the loss of their two most renowned leaders, Luxemburg and Leibknecht, during this massacre, the Right Wing strengthened their position in the party. Although the Left were among the clearest revolutionaries at the time, they still had democratic hangovers. Only five years previously, some of them had been MPs for the Social Democrats. They respected the decisions of the elected leaders of the Party, and accepted the manoeuvres of the Zentrale which led to the vote at the second Party congress in October 1919 to expel the Left.

Even after their expulsion, the Left still tried to debate with the Spartacist KPD. It was not until after the ruling class attempted to install a right wing government in the Kapp putsch of March 1920, and the KPD strove to sabotage the workers' resistance to it, that the KAPD was formed. The KPD revealed how completely reactionary it now was by agreeing with the Social Democratic government to disarm the



workers following the defeat of the putsch. The KAPD was founded on the bases of uncompromising class war for the dictatorship of the proletariat, and complete hostility to social democracy, parliament and trade unionism.

The KAPD and other Left Communist tendencies such as Sylvia Pankhurst's group in Britain still had fraternal relations with the Comintern, based in Moscow. This was in spite of the "Twenty-One Conditions of Admission" which the Comintern adopted in July 1920, which made parliamentary and trade union work mandatory.

The ideas which led up to the Twenty-One Conditions are defended by Lenin in "Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder. Gorter's Open Letter is a reply to this pamphlet defending the revolutionary opposition to participation in capitalist institutions. As we explain in our introduction to Gorter's text, the debate at this time still appeared to be a fraternal one between different wings of the communist movement. It was not until every avenue of debate had been exhausted that Gorter and the KAPD condemned the Comintern as being "in tow to the international bourgeoisie" (1921), and called for the formation of a new International.

The failure of the revolutionary wave resulted in splits and shrinkage in the KAPD in the twenties and thirties. Its ideas have been subject to various distortions by the bourgeoisie ever since. It has been condemned as syndicalist when it wasn't; as opposed to centralism where in reality it was in favour of it; as a tiny group of intellectuals whereas it regrouped tens of thousands of miners, dockers and steelworkers; as believing in spontaneous overnight revolution where in reality it advocated a long period of conscientisation for the working class. The German Left and its co-thinkers made many errors, some of which we deal with in the introduction to the pamphlet, and we do not consider ourselves the "heirs" to this tradition, but rather as eclectics who take whatever is useful and discard the rest. The German Communist Left has for a lifetime been the victim of lies from leftist and even other Left Communist tendencies. By publishing Gorter's Open Letter, we are contributing to the reemergence of an organised revolutionary movement based on the achievements of the German Left and numerous other revolutionary tendencies.

The Open Letter, 44 pages A4, costs £2.50 including postage. Ten copies or more cost £1.50 per copy. Overseas rates are \$5 US each, or \$3 each for more than ten copies. Please send blank postal or money orders to our address:

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СМЕРТЬ

The restructuring of what was the Eastern Bloc is part of a global trend. The bourgeoisie want to unleash market forces, disciplining the working class and so, they hope, delaying the onset of serious economic crisis for another few years. It is a high-risk strategy. They are attempting to maximise profits without any concern for the possibility of working class revolt. They want to draw the stagnant backwaters of capitalist development into the mainstream of the world market. Capital is becoming more fluid and internationalised, creating a more internationally integrated, and so potentially more internationalist, proletariat.

With the market has come its political corollary: democracy. Suddenly everyone is in favour of a multi-party parliamentary system.

Despite the apparently spontaneous and mass nature of the movements for democracy in Eastern Europe, the process began as a conscious decision of a fraction of the ruling class of the Soviet Union. The watchwords "Glasnost" and "Perestroika" were first proclaimed at meetings of economic advisers close to the Politburo rather than on the streets. It is Gorbachev who has been the inspiration behind the democracy movements in Eastern Europe and who was a hero to the Chinese students massacred in Tiananmen square. If the intellectuals have surged forwards with their bold new private capitalist programs it is because they have been allowed to.

There have certainly been moments when the working class have taken advantage of the social turmoil to press forwards their own interests and demands - the storming of the Stasi building in East Berlin, the miners' strikes in the USSR, the armed seizures of factories in Romania. But it is the bourgeoisie who are, for the moment, in charge. The present balance of class forces in Eastern Europe (the Soviet Union is a different matter) can be seen from the way that the class struggle has been so easily recuperated into demands for democracy and even market reforms. In Romania, the overthrow of Ceausescu's regime by the working class was quickly derailed by a section of the army and the Party suddenly declaring themselves to be in favour of clean, democratic government. In Eastern Europe the problem for the rulers is not one of introducing the market but of what will happen afterwards.

In the Soviet Union itself they are still a long way from even beginning to seriously introduce the market. There have been redundancies in various sectors of the economy but, to a large extent, full employment still exists. So does the old Stalinist method of reducing labour mobility whereby citizens carry internal passports entitling them to live in a particular area. Recently this has been used to prevent non-residents of Leningrad from buying food there.

So far they haven't dared raise prices to anything like the levels that they need to. At

ПЕРЕС

the end of 1988 there was even a decision to increase subsidies on many household goods. It is true that there is now a large "cooperative" sector, employing around 1 million people, but this is mostly concerned with retailing and services and is, in any case, largely just a legalisation of the black market which always existed side by side with price control. Coop prices are much higher than the normal state prices. They are even run by the same people, local gangsters - in the Soviet Union the word "mafia" (untranslated) is widely used to refer to this stratum. The cooperatives are widely seen by the working class as totally corrupt.

The traditional bureaucratic expansion of the economy can't continue because this has relied on the absolute expansion of the workforce and there simply aren't any more peasants ready to flock to the cities. The deepening of the world crisis has made the situation even worse than before. Whereas workers' living standards improved throughout the "corrupt" Brezhnev era, they have fallen steadily under Gorbachev. In the words of pro-perestroika sociologist Tatyana Zaslavskaya, people were promised "a good life within one to three years... now we have worse conditions than before". It was announced in Pravda on 9 Feb. that the Soviet Union will have to cut back meat production because there isn't enough grain to feed the cattle. Perestroika has had no more effect in the countryside than it has on urban industry.

A MINER PROBLEM

Gorbachev's immediate problem is how to sell a policy which involves forcing most of the population to accept lower living standards and harder work, hardly a recipe for mass support. Last year's miners' strikes in Siberia and the Ukraine show what he is up against. As a member of the Donetsk strike committee said, "Like Marx said you have nothing to lose but your chains. I just want my children to live better."

The working and living conditions of Soviet miners have got worse and worse over the last decade, a fact which has been widely acknowledged even in the official press. As a consequence of low levels of investment and maintenance there has been an ever increasing rate of accidents with ten thousand miners killed since 1980. In December 1986 and May 1987 there were major explosions in the Donbas (Ukrainian) mines.

In the first three months of 1989 there were 11 miners' strikes in the Ukraine but it was the strike in Siberia which proved to be the detonator for a much bigger wave in the summer. The strike wave in Kuzbass began in Mezhdur-echesk on 11-12 July and rapidly spread to the whole region. A strike committee was set up to coordinate action between all the pits. The movement in the Donbas began on 15 July at the Makayevka mine. It then spread to dozens of other mining towns and to the mining construction industry. Soon there would be 300,000

ТРОЙКЕ !

(Death to Perestroika)

workers on strike. 24,000 miners in Kuzbass returned to work on 19 July but the struggle in the Donbas was just beginning. State TV reported that 67 mines had joined the strike. Anatoli Saunin, a deputy in the Supreme Soviet from Makayevka, warned "you mustn't put a knife to the throat of the Supreme Soviet and the government". This warning was ignored. Numerous strike committees were formed.

The most extensive list of demands was put forward by the strike committees in Donetsk. It contained 37 points, 36 of which were straightforward working class demands, mostly for better pay and conditions. Two demands of interest were that the corrupt cooperatives should close and that the miners' union should cut its staff by 50% and provide strike pay. There was, however, one which asked for the introduction of "full regional economic self-financing", a perspective in line with Gorbachev's ideas about enterprise autonomy. This was not the only political confusion in the movement. The Chervonohrad strikers called for the setting up of a free trade union, to be called "Solidarity"!

In many areas the creation of strike committees led to a situation of virtual "dual power". One miner explained it like this: "We have taken power into our own hands in the city, we have sealed up the wine shops and stopped sales of spirits. We have allocated patrols of workers in the mining settlements, the city centre and the pits. Power is controlled by us". The committees also ran transport and helped people with medical treatment and repairs. Gorbachev described the strike as "the most difficult trial for us in the entire four years of perestroika. We had Chernobyl... Nevertheless, I would single out present events as the most serious, the most difficult". He decided against repression because of the risk of the strike spreading and so had no choice but to make wide ranging economic concessions together with the sacking of many mine and trust directors.

On 9 September the Supreme Soviet voted for a permanent ban on strikes in key sectors of the economy (including the mines). The head of the committee on labour acknowledged his debt to Thatcher's industrial relations laws in preparing the draft of the bill, and it shows. The bill says that strikes will only be legal if a system of conciliation and then arbitration fails and if a secret ballot results in a two thirds majority.

HERE AND THERE

There are certain differences between the forms and aims of the class struggle in the East and West. The suppression (though not non-existence) of the Law of Value in the East means that the working class in the East does not primarily experience its oppression as an economic relation but as something directly political, as a relationship with the state rather than with commodities. The fact that basic necessities are subsidised combined with the virtual non-

availability of luxury goods for most people means that demands for higher wages are not as important as in the West. For example, nurses in East Germany went on strike in January for pay rises of around 50% but this apparently economic demand was in fact political because its main motivation was the fact that nurses who had previously worked at secret police hospitals continued to receive higher rates of pay. It was the question of "privilege" which was important.

There is no notion of a "fair day's pay for a fair day's work" or of profit being a fair reward for "responsibility". Officially the ruling and middle classes are not particularly wealthy (for example, a top lawyer in the Soviet Union might be paid only twice the wage of a factory worker) but in reality they enjoy a standard of living comparable with their counterparts in the West. Most of their wealth, then, comes from "corruption" of one sort or another. They use their "blat" (personal connections, influence) to plunder social wealth. They are universally despised as "plunderers", "robbers", "criminals". A good deal of this corruption is directly harmful to the working class (such as corrupt allocation of food and housing) whereas in the West corruption often only harms other capitalists: the Al Fayed takeover of Harrods for example. This explains all the demands for "clean government" and calls for the sacking of particular bosses which almost always accompanies class struggle. What is important, though, is that the poor understand that the rich are responsible for their poverty. In March the Ukrainian miners were out again with other industrial workers - this time demanding the resignation of the local Party leadership. The fact that virtually all strikes are seen as political means that there is little of the sectionalism seen in the West, particularly in Britain. The Soviet miners, however, tend to see themselves as a case apart.

These generalisations should not be taken too far. In Poland, for example, there have long been market mechanisms due to the existence of a large stratum of peasants and small businessmen and far greater integration into the West. Here, working class demands have tended to focus on price rises and despite the introduction of significant unemployment in the early 80's, many people need three jobs just to survive.

A TRANSITIONAL POGROM

The Soviet Union has always been a confederation of different nationalities. This goes back to the 1918-20 civil war when there had to be alliances of different national elites. At the same time attempts at "Russification" have failed and national divisions have been deliberately encouraged for the usual reasons of "divide and rule". Every Soviet citizen is still classified according to nationality, which is recorded on their identity documents. Democratisation has led to every imaginable variety of nationalist slime oozing out of the woodwork, leading to the imminent prospect of the Union

breaking up. The creation of separate states will lead to a greater development of the market as Union-wide "planning" becomes impossible and normal trade relations take over. But even here the bourgeoisie are dragging their feet. On 11 March the newly-elected Lithuanian parliament voted for independence. The ruling nationalist party (Sajudis) have detailed plans for a Lithuanian currency which they plan to introduce this year. It will not, however, be convertible. This means that state bureaucrats will have to strike complex barter agreements and balance accounts by administrative decree. Full integration into the world market cannot be allowed just yet. It would, no doubt, destroy the "unity of the Lithuanian people" as economic security for the working class disappeared.

A SPECTRE IS HAUNTING EASTERN EUROPE

The state is weaker in many East European countries than it was a year ago, yet the working class have not so far taken advantage of this quasi power vacuum.

The workers of Eastern Europe hanker after Western living standards, as presented by the media. For years, they have been allowed to see the spectacle but not the reality. Although some parts of Eastern Europe, notably East Germany, to be followed by Czechoslovakia, are being integrated into the new West European superpower, the rest of it will be left to rot. Modern capitalism can only expand by throwing ten people into poverty for every one it enriches. This will be just as true within the Soviet Union itself. There is already mass

unemployment throughout Muslim Central Asia, Uzbekistan in particular. The new democratic governments of the East promise to lead the workers through effort and sacrifice to a more comfortable future. This will not happen.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt what is going on in the former "Eastern Bloc" countries - a counter-revolution. It is an attempt to turn a traditionally lazy, ungrateful and disruptive working class into a mass of atomised citizens desperate for work. If it succeeds it will provide a boost to capital accumulation which will put off the onset of serious recession for several years. Just as importantly, it would strengthen liberal democracy across the entire world. But this is not guaranteed. If continued resistance on the part of the working class in the former Soviet Union leads to a major class confrontation it will boost the class struggle across the world, both in encouraging proletarians to fight for their immediate interests and in politicising these struggles.

The greater integration of the Eastern Bloc into the world market has led to greater international communication and an easing of travel restrictions. This has increased the opportunity for contact between class struggle militants East and West. There are various communist tendencies in Soviet Europe, particularly in Leningrad. For obvious historical reasons, they tend to call themselves "anarchists" rather than "communists".

POLAND- SOLIDARITY WITH THE RULING CLASS



OPZZ union demo against austerity- banner says: "Mum and Dad work but their kids are hungry"

As the mass strike movement of 1980 subsided, Solidarnosc was formed to negotiate with the Polish ruling class. It organised the defeat of the class movement, acting as "flying firemen" (Walesa) to snuff out the class struggle. The Western bourgeoisie from the left-wingers to the left-footers supported the new union. Communists like us were virtually alone in pointing out how reactionary Solidarnosc was from the start - see for example our article on the mass strike in Wildcat 10.

Last year, Solidarnosc became the leading party in the Polish government. The Stalinist regime gratefully let the Pope's arselickers take charge of the sinking ship. Now they have introduced an austerity plan which far exceeds any of the measures which caused the mass strikes of 1971, 1976 and 1980. Petrol prices doubled overnight in the new year. Coal went up SIX HUNDRED PERCENT, electricity, central

heating and hot water in council flats 500%, and up to 250% bus and rail fares. Inflation is around 25% per month. People who took out mortgages on flats a year ago at 9% interest are now having to pay 40%. This is just the beginning of Solidarnosc's attack. As the economy is restructured, hundreds of thousands will be forced out of work and into starvation.

As leading Solidarnosc hack Jaszczyk put it :

"For 40 years, people did not work. They only came to work. Now we, the union, must exhort them to work harder. At the same time, we must give up demanding higher wages, lower prices and better conditions, and acknowledge that the transition to

private enterprise will be painful for our people".

So far Solidarnosc has been successful in imposing the IMF austerity program. But the danger of a revival of the class struggle is recognised by the establishment, and the union originally set up by the Communist Party, the OPZZ, is preparing to play the same role that Solidarnosc played in 1981: sabotaging the struggle from within. The working class in Poland are still a long way from creating their own autonomous fighting organisations, but we are pleased to report one bit of good news.

In mid-January the Polish Inter-City Anarchists held a demo against poverty and unemployment. They attacked Parliament, forcing the suspension of debate. Then they attacked the CP HQ, throwing a petrol bomb. Finally, they attacked the Solidarnosc HQ, smashing windows and pictures of Walesa.

ROMANIA -

The REVOLUTION will not be TELEVISED



The workers played a crucial role in the Romanian uprising and in a few strikes and demonstrations during the years preceding it. Before the generals decided to order the army to support the uprising, workers in Timisoara forced the army to withdraw from the town by threatening to blow up the petrochemical factory. They have still not completely abandoned their organisation.

At the Universal Tractor factory in Brasov, the workers took over, threw out the managers, and ran the factory themselves, guarding it with a worker's militia. In Baia Mare in the north of the country, the miners refused to accept the self-proclaimed "National Salvation Front", and insisted on appointing one of their own. In Focsan, there were trials of factory bosses for sexual harassment. In short, the workers have been very active, but this has mostly taken the form of workers' democracy and self-management so far.

As in Czechoslovakia, there has been widespread discontent in the army over conditions in the barracks and demands for the reduction of military service. Recently these demands have

been partially granted with a reduction of four months service in the army and six in the navy. This is undoubtedly a victory for the working class but it partly reflects ruling class fears of a proletariat that knows what to do with a rifle. The military competence of workers was an important component in the routing of the secret police.

Everyone in Eastern Europe has learned from the Romanian uprising. The rulers of Eastern Europe are generally less confident and more scared of the proletariat than they have been for at least a decade.

Given the continuing crisis of the bourgeoisie - it's impossible to find a credible, competent, experienced opposition - there is a quasi-power vacuum which the armed workers and soldiers could take advantage of. On the other hand, the ruling class showed great flexibility in the way it responded to the popular uprising. Most of the generals and virtually the entire Communist Party apparatus changed sides overnight, putting themselves at the head of the movement. Born-again bourgeois dissidents took over the television station and proclaimed themselves the provisional government. By keeping control of the army and killing the Ceausescus, they were able immediately to form a government to head the state apparatus. Though this government apparently has to make do without a secret police, it has the weapon of democracy. Whoever is elected will gain a certain amount of grudging tolerance from the working class for the time being, in fact workers have been prepared to defend the government against attacks by the numerous right-wing elements who have reemerged.

THE FOURTH REICH



The reunification of Germany is a massive attack on the working class. The demonstrations in Leipzig, where the popular uprising against Honecker began, degenerated into nationalist rallies. Only right-wing speakers were allowed. The bourgeoisie has made a big step towards bringing Germans to the same level of chauvinism which exists in Britain and France. For 45 years, Germany was the least nationalist European country. Still today, you can see the graffiti "Never Again Germany" in both East and West. But anti-nationalists are in a minority.

At the same time, though, the state is very weak. The secret police have been prevented from operating and the ordinary police are held in complete contempt (even by the middle classes) because of their association with the old regime. Being spat on in the street is the least of their problems. They have become so desperate for friends that they have taken to trying to ingratiate themselves with people fighting the Nazi gangs which the East German state has tolerated for decades.

ANC Fails to Suppress Class Struggle

The long-awaited negotiations between the South African government and the ANC are finally starting to happen, despite the ANC playing hard to get over the police killings at Sebokeng. The National Party (Nats) are getting desperate to negotiate with someone. They are afraid of a "white backlash" from the far Right but they fear the black working class even more. The widespread strike action in the police and prison system against racial discrimination in the system and for higher pay underlines how even the apparatus of state repression needs the cooperation of blacks to make it work. Constitutional Development Minister Gerrit Viljoen recently said that there will never be another whites-only election and that within the next decade the Nats will no longer be the governing party.

The promise of power (even just the power of being a Loyal Opposition) has meant that the ANC are now trying harder than ever to suppress the class struggle - what else can they offer the Nats in negotiations? The days when ANC leaders supported the call to "make the townships ungovernable" are long gone. After his release on 11 February, Mandela wasted no time in condemning the school boycotts and the widespread looting and hijacking of vehicles which was going on. The logic of negotiation has also led them to seek alliances with "black leaders" who have no popular credibility whatsoever - completely flying in the face of the, more or less, class conscious attitude of "non-collaboration" expressed by township militants. The ANC hasn't yet cooperated with township councillors but it has been seriously mooted; it's only a matter of time.

Homeland Sweet Homeland

This spirit of reconciliation has even included Inkatha (the Zulu fascist movement based in the "homeland" of KwaZulu in Natal). Inkatha has responded to peace overtures from the ANC/UDF by unleashing a wave of murderous attacks on "UDF areas" (areas not under complete Inkatha domination) throughout Natal. Gatsha Buthelezi

is not prepared to share power with anyone on his territory. The ANC have also been getting very pally with other homeland leaders. There are now three "independent" homelands (Venda, Ciskei and Transkei) whose leaders sympathise with the ANC and support reincorporation of their sub-states into S. Africa. Mandela has said that the ANC is prepared to "forget the past" as long as homelands act in the "interests of the people". UDF leader Patrick Lekota recently spoke of the corrupt administration which exists in "some" of the homelands.

This change of heart by the gangsters who run the homelands has come about as the result of an unprecedented wave of strikes, uprisings, looting and school boycotts in these regions. In Ciskei the overthrow of the hated Lennox Sebe in an army coup led to rioting and looting which could only be contained by means of South African troops. The coup in Venda at the beginning of April followed a week-long general strike and school boycott. The new pro-incorporation ruler, Colonel Ramushwana, said that he had seized power because the government had proved itself "powerless to maintain law and order". In Bophuthatswana, which has yet to change its political orientation, the movement has been even bigger. Mid March saw the declaration of a State of Emergency in response to the biggest stay-away since 1986. This came a few days after a massive demonstration demanding reincorporation and against rent and electricity price rises, accompanied by large scale looting and burning. Workers at Bop University went on strike for higher pay supported by the students, and won. The ANC and the UDF condemned the violence and rejected all accusations that they instigated it. However discredited the homelands are they are an important part of the South African state and neither the Nats or the ANC can allow them to be destroyed. They must be reincorporated in an orderly fashion.

The rest of South Africa has also seen a wave of unrest. In mid March youths in Khutsong township near Carletonville openly spoke of a war against the police and had burned the property and vehicles of shebeen owners known to be working with the police. In many townships there have



TO EX-MEMBERS OF WILDCAT

We have run out of some of the back issues of Wildcat, so we would be grateful if ex-members who have any under their beds could arrange to return them to us. We have nearly run out of the pamphlet on the APCF, so we would also be grateful if anyone who has spare copies could send them back.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

A four-issue subscription costs £3. £5 buys you four issues plus any pamphlets produced during the subscription. For £10, you get a "share" in Wildcat: bundles of papers will be sent for you to sell. Write to us as follows: BM CAT, LONDON WC1N 3XX, UK.

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been renewed attempts to force councillors to resign. Even in the tiny East Rand township of Tsakane a prominent local businessman was driven out of town and his shops burned and looted after he killed a resident. Eighty percent of people in the Vaal Triangle townships, including Sebokeng, are still refusing to pay council rents and service charges. A few attempts at evictions have been rapidly abandoned after violent resistance. The Transvaal Provincial Administration will increase its spending on black local authorities this year by 21%, largely to cover deficits run up as a result of non-payment. Mass non-payment can win!

Viva Compromise !??

The ANC's future ability to suppress the struggle is largely dependent on its organisation inside South Africa. It is presently establishing nine regional offices, with committees mostly composed of veteran ANC hacks, and beginning a massive drive for members. In the past the chain of command between Lusaka and, say, Guguletu has been somewhat tenuous. Over the next few months the ANC will develop the capacity to directly influence events in the townships and factories. This will undoubtedly make life harder for all those opposed to negotiations, whether from a radical nationalist point of view, such as that of the PAC, or a more class conscious one. The UDF are notorious for using manipulative methods to take over local struggles, and have not scrupled at occasionally physically attacking those who go on too much about "class struggle"

and "socialism". The ANC, which will be a real political party and not just a federation of groups and which will have enormous prestige among the passive majority, will be much worse.

It is not just as political representatives that they will gain power. The government has recently allocated R3 bn. to a fund to upgrade black housing, services and education. Two billion Rand of it will go into a trust to be run by the chairman of the Urban Foundation (a fund set up by private capital after the 1976 uprisings). The ANC and the UDF have been invited to negotiate the way that the money is spent. This will give them enormous powers of political patronage and control of resources.

But trying to please the Nats and the black working class will not be easy. The wave of struggle has led to the usual response from the state - dozens have been shot dead, thousands have been arrested and hundreds detained without trial. It is unlikely that the Nats can restrain the trigger-happy racist thugs of the South African Police even if they wanted to. To continue negotiating under these circumstances may not be good for the ANC's credibility. There is also the simple fact that the negotiations do not concern the basic material interests of the working class. As MDM leader Murphy Morobe recently admitted, negotiations do not address such issues as high rents and low wages. The unbanning of the ANC was, by the standards of South African politics, a highly sophisticated form of attack on the working class but it may yet backfire on the bourgeoisie as they find that their favourite non-racial Party of Order can't deliver the goods.

THE LETTERS PAGE

We welcome correspondence from our readers, particularly if accompanied by money. We have received an encouraging stream of letters about Gorter's Open Letter which we recently published, as well as more general political issues. Please try to send BLANK postal or money orders, as we don't yet have a bank account, and sending cash can be risky. Write as follows: BM CAT, London WC1N 3XX, UK.

Dear Wildcat,

Looking forward to seeing Letter to Comrade Lenin as well as your de-liberalised political platform.

I hope that in your political platform, or elsewhere, you'll say a bit more of what you think of 'decadence' theory on the one hand and Lenin/the Bolsheviks/Red October on the other. If you reject the former, does that mean that communism has always been... "available"? If you deny any October 'dictatorship of the proletariat', it certainly can't be because you find the Bolsheviks were insufficiently 'democratic'. Is lack of concurrent socialisation measures in economics the reason for denying a political dictatorship of the proletariat? I'm confused about your position. Perhaps in a foreword to the Gorter letter you'll take up such matters?

DA, Taiwan.

Dear Comrade,

Thanks for your letter. We have not given anything like enough attention to issues such as the Russian revolution, decadence and numerous others. We have so much to do, with so few resources. However, we will try to briefly answer some of your points. Perhaps in the distant past there was a period when communism was impossible, and class society was inevitable. However, this was certainly earlier than the 16th century. At this time there was a stronger communist movement in Europe than at any time since - the so-called "millenarian" movements in Bohemia and Germany. Their co-thinkers in England during the Civil War realised that there was nothing to choose between Cromwell and the King. No faction of the bourgeoisie has ever been worth supporting, this did not suddenly become true in 1914!

The Bolsheviks made no attempt to create communism. Even their state capitalist measures were only carried out under pressure from the workers. The Bolsheviks tried to make peace with the Entente powers. It was only when this was rejected that they were forced to fight. However, the Red Army did not fight a communist guerilla war against the White armies, in fact they crushed the communist movement in the Ukraine. The Russian civil war was an inter-bourgeois war. There cannot be a dictatorship of the proletariat over capitalism, because

capitalism is the exploitation of the proletariat. You cannot impose a dictatorship over your own exploitation. The claim that the proletariat can organise a state power to successfully organise the period of transition to communism - in other words, to organise, then abolish, the exploitation of wage labour - is a denial of materialism, and a reformist utopia. There will no doubt be a state, perhaps a democratically elected workers' state, during the period of transition to communism. We will advocate an intransigent war against it. A state power in an area which is not yet communist is a state power over capitalism. No state power, no matter how many workers support it, which is in charge of capitalism, can avoid being anything other than a capitalist state. There cannot be a transitional "society", because the period of transition is the escalation of the class war. A war is not a society.

We realise how brief this reply is. We will reply to you in detail, and give more attention to these crucial questions, just as soon as we've distributed this paper.

SPANISH DOCKERS: WORKERS' DEMOCRACY AGAINST THE WORKERS

In Wildcat 9 we published an article about the dockers strikes in Gijon during 1983-85, in the midst of a wave of class struggle in Spain. In our introduction, we defended the Coordinadora organisation, claiming it "stands for all-out struggle against the bosses", and praising its democratic form of organisation, "controlled directly by the working class organised in assemblies". Below we publish extracts from a letter from comrades in Spain, correcting our assessment of the Coordinadora. They have also informed us that the unions have successfully defeated the struggles in Spain. We have one or two disagreements, for example where they contrast violence against scabs to spreading the struggle, whereas both are necessary. If you read Spanish, you can obtain these comrades' journal, *Odio al Capitalismo*, by writing to them as follows: AV Vida Natural, Ap de Correos no 25, 27080 Lugo, Spain. You can also help us translate it.

Dear Comrades,

...about the "Coordinadora de Estibadores" [Coordination of Dockers]... it has made appeals along with the CNT [anarcho-syndicalists] and the other unions "against the privatisation of the OPT" [which is a state board which plans the work at the docks, and controls the activities of the dock workers; for instance, it punished more than a hundred dockers during the strike of 1986; i.e. they are the direct representatives of the boss in the docks]...

They declare themselves to be a union, they have been legally accepted by the state since October 1978, they allow the CNT to organise within them, and sometimes even CCOO [official Communist Party union body] hacks are allowed to be spokesmen in negotiations with the state and to the media. They don't hide it. Their

criticism of other unions is not of their anti-working class role but of their "bureaucratisation" (see their paper *La Estiba*).

But it is not only that they call themselves a union. What they actually do puts them with the rest of the unions, and the most dangerous, because the most "radical": they have carefully maintained the dockers' isolation, leading them into dead ends and burning down their combativity, covering these manoeuvres with the most radical verbiage. How?

- By token actions, such as the legal strike. In the second phase of the conflict, after having reduced the workers' combativity (remember that the first phase of the conflict showed the workers chasing the rest of the unions out of the ports, and the Coordinadora made no small effort to contain the strike inside the ports, sending ridiculous pickets of a few people to the factories, as for instance in Valencia, limiting their action to a call for the "solidarity" of the enterprise committee at the Ford car plant (an "enterprise committee" is a permanent legal union body in a particular plant) and not the solidarity action of the workers there. And they call that spreading the struggle!

- Whenever the rest of the workers stay quiet, they don't open their mouths, don't send delegates. And that's not because of ingenuousness or lack of experience! They have existed since 1978. They don't have representatives at all the Spanish ports, but at all ports the dock workers felt angry and some of them were distrustful with the Coordinadora's actions (or rather lack of actions). The Coordinadora didn't say a word about the perspectives of the temporary dockers and didn't lift a finger for common action in the struggle.

- In September, after the Government's decree for restructuring work at the ports, they began a legal, partial strike in CONTENEMAR (which was the first enterprise to put the decree in practice, an action carefully prepared in conjunction with the government and the rest of the unions, which openly accepted the decree, meaning several thousand redundancies) not calling the rest of the dockers on strike. What did they do instead? When the bosses used scabs, the Coordinadora physically attacked them and fixed the workers' attention on this, just as the rank and file unionists did in the miners' strike in Britain, i.e. lead the workers into the trap of repression/anti-repression, when the REAL NECESSITY was to spread the strike to other places, by massive picketing and controlling the struggle by general meetings and revocable and responsible strike committees, preparing demonstrations and/or other sorts of struggle actions, etc.. The real problem was not the scabs, but corporatism [i.e. workers identifying only with the struggle in their own industry] which was reinforced by the Coordinadora. The combined efforts of the bosses, the government and the Coordinadora drowned the struggle, slowly, month by month....

The Coordinadora promised not to accept the agreements which sold out the workers, signed by the CCOO, the UGT, the radical Basque union ELA-STV, etc.. Six months of "struggle" in the CONTENEMAR affair ended like this:

"...the Coordinadora de Estibadores and the port

enterprise CONTENEMAR came to a first agreement, after six months of conflict, on restructuring the OTP, as was known yesterday from sources in the docks ... both parties agreed to respect the agreements signed prior to the publication of the decree restructuring the OTP [agreements and decree against which the workers began the struggle]... These agreements [which mean redundancies] mean complete satisfaction for the dockers' demands" - *El Pais*, 19 Feb. 87....

The CCOO, the UGT and the rest of the unions are really discredited among the dockers since the very beginning of the struggle, because they signed and accepted straight away. Radical rank and file unionism is a bigger trap because it is not easily detected as unionism. And sometimes the origins of such organisations make it more difficult to understand their real nature. That is the case with the Coordinadora.

LIBERTY FOR THE PRISONERS OF DEMOCRACY

This is a leaflet produced by the Argentinian communist group Emancipacion Obrera following the riots in May of last year, in which thousands of poor workers looted supermarkets. Democracy has brought no solution to the problems of the Argentinian bourgeoisie. Recently, the bosses have been forced to give away food in the districts which rioted last year to prevent a further round of uprisings. Like the other major Latin American economies, Argentina is falling apart, and the bourgeoisie fear a mass proletarian response.

The leaflet makes fairly straightforward points about the nature of capitalist society and calls on workers to support those arrested for looting food shops. Allowing for whatever has been lost in translation, we think the tone of the article is rather moralistic: rather than blaming the bosses for "inciting" looting and rioting, communists should enthusiastically support them and call for their extension and organisation. The comrades should also give other concrete examples, based on their knowledge of local conditions, of how to "raise our organised rebellion".



In the last few days, a great number of people have been imprisoned for looting from supermarkets, accused of robbery and similar things.

Everything that is sold by shopkeepers is made and fashioned by OUR CLASS, from a box of matches to a television. THESE THINGS ARE STOLEN FROM US LEGALLY AND NOBODY COMPLAINS ABOUT IT. Yet those who produce usually lack the means to consume, except what is necessary to avoid dying of hunger. AND NOW, NOT EVEN THAT. We don't add our voice to the chorus of defenders of capitalist property. We repeat, as our ancestors sung decades ago in their struggles:

"The car, the club, the mansion,
The bosses' yacht,
Came from the exploitation
Of the proletariat's labour.

It reproduces nothing but money.
Bank-notes do not lay eggs.
And the robber-bosses
Steal from all who labour."

Even if we accept that attacking supermarkets is not the solution to our condition of exploitation, nevertheless those who have incited these desperate acts are the bourgeoisie, electoral politics, the unions (who are always a part of capitalist power), the governors and the managers.

They are the ones who use violence against us daily, who exploit us, create unemployment, reduce our wages, and commit murder. A HUMAN LIFE IS OF NO USE TO A PILE OF GROCERIES, NOR TO ANY COMMODITY. Without looting the poorest people risk seeing the death of their children. And the ruling class, its Peronist and radical governments (Reviglio), and the owners of industries have no scruples about ordering to shoot to kill and have done so. THEY ARE ROBBERS AND MURDERERS.

Thousands captured, treated worse than animals, without any information being given out, in the best military style. This shows that democracy is the other face of capitalist power. To be "an honest worker" is to behave like a lamb, to vote to stay in that position in spite of one's deprivation. But whoever rebels and struggles against capital, is a delinquent.

The real delinquents are the members of the ruling class and their lackeys - of left and right - in the workers' movement.

Against the exploitation and barbarism of capitalism the only response is to prepare for the anti-capitalist, proletarian, social revolution, and in this way, to struggle to secure our existence and improve it, to attack the laws of its system, its profits, etc..

We deny the bourgeois state - democratic or military - the right to detain, torture and assassinate.

Comrade, don't fall for the campaigns of disinformation, demobilisation and lies. Don't listen to all the rumours and news stories which are designed to make the workers fight amongst themselves; or which call the system's victims the guilty ones.

We call on you not to remain indifferent to the fate of those who are the most deprived and oppressed by the bosses' state power. Let's discuss and organise for the fight against capitalist exploitation and repression. Let's raise our organised rebellion against all capitalism's repressive institutions: state, armed forces and security police, unions, newspaper publishers, parliamentary parties, etc., for the immediate liberty of all those detained and for all convictions to be quashed.

31 May 1989.



Militant SCUM WILL GRASS YOU UP



After the first few mini-riots against the Poll Tax, the media initially blamed Militant, who control the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation. Militant profusely denied stirring it up, and condemned the violence.

Following the battle of Trafalgar Square, they went a bit further than merely condemning the use of violence by working class people to defend themselves against their enemies. Tommy Sheridan of Militant, chairman of the Federation, said it would hold an enquiry to identify individuals involved in violence, theft and criminal damage and their names would be passed to the police. (Guardian 2 April 1990).

On the 9.45 News on ITN, Sunday 1 April, Steve Nally, another Militant leader, concurred:

"We will hold our own enquiry which will go public, and which, if necessary, will name names".

This is not an April Fool's Day joke. Militant have openly stated that they will grass up class struggle militants to the state. This is the most blatant instance of how Militant are allies of the state against the anti-Poll Tax movement. Let's make it clear - this example alone proves that Militant are enemies of the working class. We call on all anti-Poll Tax groups to break from Militant and the Federation, and to ask any Militant members either to leave the group or resign from Militant.

The state is trying to use the violent protests as a way of criminalising the whole movement, and Militant is aiding and abetting it.

Militant's policy from the start has been to divert the movement from actually fighting the tax to putting pressure on the Labour Party to "take the lead". Militant know that this won't work, but by wasting people's time and energy, they hope to "expose" the leadership for what they are. This is in the long tradition of spreading lies about the ability of the Labour Party to fight for the working class, in order to expose the fact that they can't.

As Labour councils implemented the tax, Militant gradually abandoned the demand "Labour Councils: Don't Implement the Tax". They instead demand that they don't fine non-payers. When this fails, they will demand that Labour councils call off the bailiffs. When this fails, they will demand that Labour councils don't send people to jail and so on.

As well as diverting the campaign into wasting time and resources pressurising Labour, Militant have tried to sabotage the real resistance which is taking place.

Where they have been unable to take control of local anti-poll tax groups, they have set up their own parallel groups. They claim to speak on behalf of the local anti-poll tax campaign to try to falsify the real aim of the movement. One of the best examples of this tactic was when, on 6 December 1988, the Lothian Anti-Poll Tax Federation prevented a Regional Council meeting by occupying the chamber, two Militant members of the Federation went to the press and denounced the occupation as the work of "a minority" who "disrupted our plan to put our case in an orderly fashion to the council".

The London Federation of Anti-Poll Tax Groups, together with the Avon federation, called a national meeting of groups on 3 September 1989 to prepare for a national conference on 25 November. The Militant-controlled Scottish APT Federation mailed all the federations except London that they only recognised a conference which had been called for the morning of the 1 September: a Friday, to ensure it would be dominated by Militant full-timers. A leaflet was distributed at the 3 September meeting exposing this and other examples of Militant manipulation. There were howls of indignation and cries of "sectarian" from the Militant supporters present but they could not deny any of the specific allegations made by genuine anti-poll tax militants at the meeting. Far from being sectarian, most of the people involved were concerned about being "open and democratic" in spite of the evidence that Militant just take advantage of this.

It's not a question of openness against sectarianism. It's a question of defending class struggle militants against police repression. It's a question of defending the working class. If we can't defend those being victimised for the violent reaction the Poll Tax has caused, we will all be easier to victimise in the future. Part of this struggle is exposing the ruling class's left wing friends. This issue has to be openly confronted now. Everyone in an anti-Poll Tax group should be clear just how dangerous these people are. If anyone has joined Militant thinking it is a genuine working class organisation, we ask them to think again.

WILDCAT

15 April 1990.